

# Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

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\* Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play during the week of May 27, 1940.

### THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

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# THEATRE REVIEW

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# "Russian Bank"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, May 25, 1940

## 'Russian Bank,' a Dramatic Oddity, Opens at the St. James Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

**L**UDICROUS things happen in the theater. Last evening, for example, Theodore Komisarjevsky, who has produced the works of other playwrights on the Continent, obliged at the St. James with a play of his own called "Russian Bank" and devoted to the efforts of an opera singer to save her titled lover from the cruel Bolsheviks of 1917. She did this by giving herself, as it is technically known in plays of this type, to a ruthless commissar. In the end she came to love the commissar.

On the classic simplicity of this plot, Mr. Komisarjevsky has built a drama which is in itself, and in an odd, tormenting fashion, equally a classic. It will be remembered in years to come that the fading days of the season of 1939-1940 marked the advent of "Russian Bank," by Mr. Komisarjevsky and Stuart Mims. We must not forget Mr. Mims. Perhaps it was he who invented the whiskery parents who jumped up and down in an opera house dressing room in the opening scene and set the pitch for what was to come.

I cannot give you more than a hint as to what thereafter came. No words can describe the weird mixture of operetta sentiment, singing gypsies, melodramatic stratagems and burlesque revolutionaries contrived by Mr. Komisarjevsky and Mr. Mims, whose name is so refreshingly short and easy to spell. There is no way to intimate what each of

these elements did to the others, so that in the end no two characters seemed to be involved even remotely in the same play. You might be pleased, if words of sufficient delicacy could be achieved for the telling, to learn how an overdose of digestive pills freed the pale aristocrat unromantically from his dungeon and sent him tottering toward Finland.

But perhaps you have heard enough and would rather guess the rest. You will not be able to guess the mad extravagance of Mr. Komisarjevsky's direction, which sent distracted actors leaping madly in all directions. There is no reason why you should; these things, too, will pass. Mr. Rennie will return to other plays, Miss Houston will go back to singing, which she does nicely. Mr. Komisarjevsky's singing gypsies will go—but there

### 'RUSSIAN BANK'

A play with songs by Theodore Komisarjevsky and Stuart Mims; directed and produced at the St. James Theater on May 24, 1940, by Mr. Komisarjevsky; settings by Louis Bromberg. The cast:

|                                                                                                                                                                               |                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Masha .....                                                                                                                                                                   | Natasha Boleslavsky |
| Serov .....                                                                                                                                                                   | Mikhail Rasumny     |
| Serova .....                                                                                                                                                                  | Natalie Harris      |
| Natasha .....                                                                                                                                                                 | Josephine Houston   |
| Butenko .....                                                                                                                                                                 | James Rennie        |
| Patterson .....                                                                                                                                                               | Ralph Morehouse     |
| Madame La Generale .....                                                                                                                                                      | Denizova            |
| .....                                                                                                                                                                         | Jeane Palmer        |
| Valeria .....                                                                                                                                                                 | Ernestine Stodell   |
| Lisa .....                                                                                                                                                                    | Jay Mannering       |
| Baron Oeberg .....                                                                                                                                                            | Roger Flowden       |
| Count Maleky .....                                                                                                                                                            | Gerald Kean         |
| Grand Duke Nikita .....                                                                                                                                                       | Tonio Selwart       |
| Shubina .....                                                                                                                                                                 | Elena Karam         |
| Koulinis .....                                                                                                                                                                | George Andre        |
| Cameron .....                                                                                                                                                                 | John Adair          |
| Shnizel .....                                                                                                                                                                 | Mikhail Rasumny     |
| Petrova .....                                                                                                                                                                 | Geena Goodwin       |
| Revolutionaries: Alexis Bolan, Michel Michon, Michel Greben, Arcady Stoyanovsky, Ivan Triessault, Boris Belostosky.                                                           |                     |
| Gypsy Man .....                                                                                                                                                               | Michel Michon       |
| Gypsy Girl .....                                                                                                                                                              | Marjorie Tas        |
| Gypsies: Ara Shvedova, Elena Arafelova, Natasha Boleslavsky, Gedda Petry, Evelyn Marsh, Arcady Stoyanovsky, Boris Belostosky, Alexis Bolan, Michel Greben, Feodor Zarkavitch. |                     |
| Cleopatra .....                                                                                                                                                               | Marjorie Tas        |
| Mrs. Cameron .....                                                                                                                                                            | Effie Shannon       |
| Katie .....                                                                                                                                                                   | Natalie Harris      |
| Poushnoff .....                                                                                                                                                               | Arcady Stoyanovsky  |
| Tipoff .....                                                                                                                                                                  | Alexis Bolan        |

is no telling where they will go. Miss Effie Shannon, trapped uncomfortably in the last act but obviously encouraged by her own realization of the impermanence of the whole affair, will return to the acting she does so admirably. In time we shall all forget.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, May 25, 1940

## 'Russian Bank' Adds Romance to the Revolution in a Drama Staged by Komisarjevsky

By BROOKS ATKINSON

**S**INCE the Russian revolution is getting on toward a quarter of a century old, the time has come to treat it in terms of Graustark and Ruritania. That is what Theodore Komisarjevsky and Stuart Mims are doing in "Russian Bank," which was staged at the St. James last evening. It is an old-fashioned romance that runs through a number of the clichés from Natasha's dressing room at the Imperial Opera House in St. Petersburg on the eve of the revolution to the luxurious drawing room of a Long Island mansion where the grand duke loses the opera singer for the last time. Some of the plain-clothes men and women in the audience last evening thought they detected in the story odds and ends of "Waltz in Goose Step," which was an anti-Nazi play, and "The Unconquered," which made a wry face at Bolshevism. But probably that only goes to show that "Russian Bank" is the sort of play you think you have seen many times before.

Mr. Mims has no previous record in this

office Cheka. But Mr. Komisarjevsky is an eminent man of the theatre, a regisseur in the European tradition, one-time director at famous Russian institutions and since the revolution an active producer in London. He also designs scenery. He is author of several books about the theatre. About four years ago he staged in London a remarkable production of "The Sea Gull," which by good fortune this theatregoer happened to

see. On the basis of his experience one naturally expects to see under his direction a performance that represents superior craftsmanship.

But there is nothing in "Russian Bank" to suggest mastery of any department of the theatre. The plays tells in loose style a story of an opera singer who is in love with a grand duke. "You were divine," the backstage visitors say after the opera is over. "You were wonderful, my dear," some one else says by way of variety. After the revolution, the opera singer, under duress, goes to live with the commissar of finance. Using his authority, she manages to get the grand duke out of jail and smuggled to America. "Russian Bank" almost becomes original in the last scene when the opera singer renounces the grand duke when she meets him in America, and at long last consents to marry the commissar.

The part of the opera singer is played by Josephine Houston, who is an attractive young lady with an excellent singing voice. Tonio Selwart plays the cryptic part of the grand duke with as much pleasantness as he can summon from his own personality, and James Rennie plays the commissar robustly. Effie Shannon acts a Long Island millionaire in the best of taste. As a raw American who manages a bank in Russia, Ralph Morehouse relieves the general monotony occasionally by being amusing. But the parts are so colorless as the play and the performance in general is conventional and sprawling. Apart from a few Russian songs, which are wholly enchanting, "Russian Bank" is the quintessence of the commonplace.

# "Russian Bank"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, May 25, 1940

## "Russian Bank" Is a Story of Bolsheviks And Bankers in 1917

"Russian Bank," a comedy by Theodore Komisarjevsky and Stuart Mims. Produced by Mr. Komisarjevsky at the St. James theatre, New York, May 24, 1940.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THE exercises at the St. James Theatre last night, during the presentation of Theodore Komisarjevsky's comedy called "Russian Bank," were no doubt authentically Russian in many scenes but, unhappily, never very interesting. Mr. Komisarjevsky, who has been a stage director of parts for a good many years, wrote and produced this naive story of the experiences of a Russian prima donna and an American banker during the revolution of 1917. Stuart Mims was his collaborator.

### All for Love

The prima donna, engaged to a Russian Grand Duke, gives herself to a handsome Bolshevik Commissar to make things easier for her royal lover. The American banker is her friend, and also the custodian of her funds.

Comes the revolution and the comrades take the funds, the Commissar takes the prima donna, the banker tries to take the bank's papers out of the country and a group of gypsies take time out to sing sad songs and say.

Fifteen years later they all wind up on Long Island, where Effie Shannon gracefully plays American hostess to everybody, including the singing gypsies.

Here the prima donna comes to know that she really loves her Commissar better than

she loved her Grand Duke and everybody is dressed up and happy.

### Nice for Refugees

Nice for the Russian colony, perhaps, this lightly comic reminiscence of their past experiences. The cast is studded with refugees and their singing is pleasant.

Josephine Houston, a handsome blonde lady with a soothing voice, plays the prima donna. Her lovers include Tony Selwart as the Grand Duke and James Rennie as a pretty slick Bolshevik.

Ralph Morehouse plays a blustery banker and there are a variety of short parts competently filled.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, May 25, 1940

## Waste of Time

By RICHARD WATT Jr.

THE little gem at the St. James Theater is something or other about the Russian Revolution. In it you will find, if you insist on it, such representative Muscovites as Masha, Nataasha, Butienko, Shubina, Schnizel, Poushnoff, Tipoff and the Grand Duke Nikita reacting emotionally to the Bolshevik experiment, with songs. As nearly as I could gather from three acts of close study, this "Russian Bank" is all about a no doubt fascinating opera singer who accepts what might be called the advances of a dashing commissar to save her lover, the democratic Grand Duke Nikita, and then comes to love the man who has made her his mistress. It is all very dull and foolish.

Although it is obviously anti-Bolshevik in its sentiments, "Russian Bank" cannot resist the charms of its dashing commissar, and you will find him changing handsomely from villain to hero before your eyes. If you have a powerful memory you may recall that a previous anti-Red play called "The Unconquered" had pretty much the same story and the central character turned out in much the same way. When "The Unconquered" opened, the reviewers were rather harsh with it, and, after seeing "Russian Bank," I am inclined to believe that all of us owe the author of the earlier melodrama an apology. By comparison with the new thing, it was by way of being a masterpiece. In its indictment of the Soviet Union, incidentally, "Russian Bank" moves back and forth between heavy drama and gay banter. You can tell the heavy drama

because it is funny and the gay banter because it is so grim.

In the last act most of the characters move on to America, and the dialogue thereupon lapses chiefly into Russian. I, for one, found it more soothing that way. All of this pompous nonsense has been operatically produced by Theodore Komisarjevsky, who is also responsible for the book (with a fellow culprit named Stuart Mims) and helped to arrange the songs. I hardly think that Mr. Komisarjevsky adds to his international reputation as producer, director, author or song arranger. James Rennie, Tonio Selwart, Miss Josephine Houston, Miss Effie Shannon and other willing performers labor diligently but to no particular avail. The production is so elaborate that apparently some one has faith in "Russian Bank." It seems that there never is a cause so futile that some one will not believe in it.

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# "Russian Bank"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, May 25, 1940

## "Russian Bank" Presented At the St. James Theatre

By WILLELLA WALDORF

SEVERAL months ago George Abbott produced a dire drama about Soviet Russia entitled "The Unconquered." The reviews were decidedly adverse and Mr. Abbott hastily whisked the thing out of sight, hoping it would be forgotten. And it would have been had not Theodore Komisarjevsky seen fit to produce a play of his own authorship at the St. James Theatre last night under the title "Russian Bank." After viewing the new arrival we are inclined to think that perhaps, after all, "The Unconquered" was not so bad. Compared to "Russian Bank," in fact, it seems to have been a little gem, a masterpiece of its kind. Mr. Abbott, who is now in Hollywood, will probably not care to have the subject brought up again at this late date, but it appears his error lay in producing "The Unconquered" before instead of after "Russian Bank."

Mr. Komisarjevsky, who was assisted in writing "Russian Bank" by Stuart Mims, goes back to dear old Petersburg in 1917 for his start, messes around there a bit in 1918 and then takes a running jump into Long Island in 1923, when everybody but Effie Shannon looked younger. Miss Shannon had the good luck not to figure in the Petersburg upheaval.

### Mystery Play?

Profound cogitation on the subject has failed to shed even a glimmer of light on what Mr. Komisarjevsky and Mr. Mims were trying to get at in "Russian Bank," but

after consulting a ouija board and doing some quick figuring on the back of an envelope we have reached the conclusion that perhaps they were trying to point out that while the Russian Revolution made things downright unpleasant for the aristocracy for a while, on the whole it was rather a silly affair and those who escaped alive have managed since to make themselves quite comfortable, thank you.

"Russian Bank," however, is really something of a mystery play, for this may not be what the authors meant to convey at all. In fact, it is possible they did not mean to convey much of anything, in which case they have succeeded admirably. Da, Da, Da. Come, a toast to the Czar, Baron Oelsberg, Count Malsky!

It is regrettable that in the interest of re-

portorial accuracy we never managed to discover whether it was the Baron or the Count who kept drinking wood alcohol out of a teapot and muttering "She is Russian and therefore peculiar" by way of general explanation of the goings-on of his fellow players. Occasionally the Baron—or perhaps it was the Count—grew introspective and muttered instead "I am Russian and therefore peculiar." This lent an air of variety to the dialogue, which bristled with such words as "ideology," "counter-revolutionary," "Marxism" and cholera.

### A Gentleman of Repute

Not the least of the mysteries connected with this production is the fact that Mr. Komisarjevsky is a gentleman, of considerable repute in the Continental and British theatre as well as the author of several books on the drama and a personage of some importance in pre-Revolutionary Russia. Had we not known that this is so, and that an impressive amount of data appears under his name in Who's Who in the Theatre, we should have been quite certain last night that "Russian Bank" was produced, directed and written by someone of meagre experience in matters of professional stagecraft.

The play is billed as a play with songs, and the musical end, meagre but refreshing, is all that we can conscientiously recommend about "Russian Bank." Miss Josephine Houston as a Petersburg opera singer revealed a pleasant soprano when given half a chance, several Russian baritones boomed accordingly, accompanying themselves on guitars, and a bevy of gypsies suddenly strolled out of an ante-room of Madame La Generale Denisova's flat, where they had presumably been hiding in the samovar waiting for just such an opportunity. There was even a dash of dancing.

James Rennie made a nice, easy-going Komissar. Tonio Selwart lent his charm and accent to the role of the Grand Duke Nikita, who came to America and became a radio favorite, and a large troupe of supporting players did what they could, but it was simply no use. They should have sung more of their sad songs and given us less of the play.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, May 25, 1940

## Audience Loses at Russian Bank

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

RUSSIAN BANK, a mixture of melodrama, comedy and music produced mysteriously last night at the St. James Theater, is such an astoundingly bad play that it is hypnotic in its effect. Many a spectator, determined to rush madly into the night between acts, finds himself chained to his seat by an irresistible curiosity to see the rest of it, on the chance that the whole thing may be some gigantic hoax.

One of the supreme mysteries of the theater, and one of the things about this business that is at once its despair and hope, is the apparent ease with which money can be found to produce plays—even of a quality such as this. This was no inexpensive production. Louis Bromberg's solid settings must have cost something. The cast of some 30 persons must have been paid the Equity minimum, although in some cases they would thus have been grossly overpaid.

The same characters who infested a play earlier this season under the title The Un-

conquered are found again in Russian Bank. Moreover the same situation exists, elaborated only by the introduction of a fuzzily drawn American banker who, believe it or not, is forced to work for the revolutionary government for an entire year before they'll let him go home. The stock characters Mr. Komisarjevsky works into his play are an aristocrat who is in love with a peasant, a

commissar who also loves the peasant and who takes the girl as payment for letting the nobleman escape from Russia, a spinster (comedy, of course) who rises to power and thereafter marries six or seven men successively, a decayed general's widow, two moth-eaten barons and half a dozen comedy Bolsheviks.

Considerable music is injected into this confusion, mainly to give Miss Josephine Houston, who really has a pleasant voice, a chance to sing some properly haunting songs including the old familiar Dark Eyes. This element also gave Mr. Komisarjevsky further opportunity to clutter his stage with guitarists, accompanist, players and even one somewhat uncertain dancer for what dramatic purpose is another of the many riddles presented by the weird play.

The acting, under such circumstances is quite as maudlin as the drama. James Rennie, as the ever-loving commissar, runs the gamut of impersonations from a comedy coachman to a suave man-of-the-world, like an old-time actor busting out of one door and in through another with a complete change of wardrobe and makeup in five seconds flat. Tonio Selwart gives a more subdued and believable performance as the unfortunate grand duke. I felt sorry to see Effie Shannon in such a play, as an unbelievably saccharine dowager.

The only possible reason that might be found for anyone's visiting Russian Bank would be that he mistook it for bank night at the movies.



# "Keep Off the Grass"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, May 24, 1940

## "Keep Off the Grass," a Lively Burlesk With Jimmie Durante

"Keep Off the Grass," musical revue in two acts. Produced by the Messrs. Shubert at the Broadhurst Theatre, New York, May 23, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THE Messrs. Shubert are the boys who believe that one good burlesque deserves another. Having filled the last two Summers with such joy as Olsen and Johnson and Abbott and Costello brought to town and released in "Hells a Poppin'" and "Streets of Paris" they are playing a new one called "Keep Off the Grass" across the boards at the Broadhurst.

This one offers you Jimmie Durante, counted by many of you as a card of cards; Ray Bolger, the best of the dancers since Jack Donahue left us, and Ilka Chase, who is too rare a comedienne for this sort of thing, though she certainly makes the best of her situation.

There is also the lustrous Jane Froman, solemn, soulful and as melodious as any mezzo soprano in musical comedy. Miss Froman apparently sings the same song over and over, but happily it is a pleasant song.

Virginia O'Brien also contributes a series of what the profession knows, I am informed, as "dead pan swing" numbers.

### Handsome Newcomer

Miss O'Brien is handsomely expressionless. You may believe she is burlesquing the torch singers, or the blues sisters, or you may decide she is just doing the sort of thing that

accidentally brought her a good deal of applause out Hollywood way.

Her charm is a shade elusive, but she was a huge success with her first New York audience last night, which should make her happy and guarantee her a variety of jobs during the summer.

Mr. Durante is as hard-working as usual. Age cannot wither the infinite variety of his grunts, groans, expostulations and explosions. He works with the singers, he works with the dancers, he works with a flock of monkeys and he does a lot more for the sketch writers than they do for him.

I thought him funniest as a Metropolitan Museum guide in a sketch by S. Jay Kaufman, and one of a trio singing "Rhett, Scarlett and Ashley," Miss Chase and Mr. Bolger being his associates. This is a patter song frankly on the coarse side, burlesquing the "Gone With the Wind" excitement.

He has a burlesque Shakespeare scene in which he tries to play Romeo to Miss Chase's Juliet with an imitation Olsen and Johnson providing the interference. His effort was honest but his success was considerably dimmed, probably because Olsen and Johnson were not consulted.

### Bolger's Repertory

Mr. Bolger dances through his repertory, from expert tapping to astonishing acrobatic, sometimes with a gifted Betty Bruce, sometimes with an equally gifted Sunnie O'Dea. And always to rewarding applause. The outstanding ballet number is built around a song called "Look Out for My Heart," introducing a fencing chorus and an exhibition by Joanna and Bela de Tuscan that is pretty thrilling.

Shackles, is the handsome baritone of the proceedings, and a good balladist. The Morelli sisters are a harmony group well trained and tuneful. Jose Limon is a vigorous ballet leader.

There are a couple of good lyrics by Howard Dietz, "Two in a Taxi" and "A Fugitive from Esquire," but the sketches, I thought, were pretty weak.

The music is mostly by James McHugh. George Balanchine directed the dances. Nat Karson did the costumes and scenery, and both are effective.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, May 24, 1940

## Keep Off the Grass Is Strong, Lusty Revue

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THE humor of *Keep Off the Grass*, the new revue which the Shuberts opened last night as an offering for our summer guests at the Broadhurst, is lusty and strong. In literary circles it would be termed Rabelaisian, which means that it has the stout atmosphere of the back room at Joe's place. But it also has the exuberant and athletic wit of Jimmie Durante to keep it moving, together with certain other numbers which would be a riotous success even in a less frantic environment.

It is Mr. Durante, with his vigorous onslaught on the dictionary and his vehement clowning, who provokes the laughter, rather than the sketches which were written for him. With one exception, these were based on obvious ideas—the Roosevelt family, *Gone With the Wind*, *Information Please*—the humor of which has worn pretty thin by this time. Nevertheless, Mr. Durante takes them by the scruff of the neck, so to speak, and shakes the laughter out of them.

The one happy exception, it seemed to me, was a bit called *A Fugitive from Esquire*, with a lyric by Howard Dietz. It showed the glowing schmoose above a pinkish sport coat and green plaid trousers and beneath a yellow Alpine hat, and was concerned with the utter mortification of the resplendent come-

dian when Lucius Beebe cut him dead. The lyrics were ingenious.

Burlesque of *Life with Father*, with the Roosevelt family in red wigs, of the *Oliver Romeo* and *Juliet*, in the manner of *Helzapoppin*, and of *G. W. T. W.*, to the tune of *Marching Through Georgia*, lost their effectiveness because of their length, and some of them might be eliminated without injury to the revue. Mr. Durante as a tree surgeon, however, brought gales of well-earned laughter.

Passing for the moment over the three stars associated with Mr. Durante (Ray Bolger, Jane Froman and Ilka Chase) we reach the name of Miss Virginia O'Brien, whom the Shuberts have imported from the West for her specialty, a burlesque of blues singers. Miss O'Brien's performance is one of the dazzling moments of the evening. The utter seriousness with which she tosses out off-key minor notes, the trickery of her exaggerated syncopation, the perfection of this musical lampoon is something that must be heard to be appreciated.

Another performance that nearly stops the show is the dancing of Betty Bruce, particularly in a number called *I'll Applaud You with My Feet*. She is dynamite.

Miss Chase comes over to musical comedy, as you know, from the legitimate side. Her flair for comedy cannot be questioned and she makes an excellent foil for the dashing Durante. She needs better material, that's all, Miss Froman is lovely to look at—a nice, wholesome girl who sings well and has good stage presence.

Ray Bolger is one of the hardest working performers in *Keep Off the Grass*, and one of the most successful in winning an audience. His dance routines are novel and exhilarating and he has a good sense of comedy. Our old friends, Stanislava Waterfall in *The Straw Hat Revue* are in the new show with a bright sketch in which Miss Davis gets tied up with a group of bird lovers who happen to be hiking through Central Park.

James McHugh's music is of the standard musical comedy variety, gay and smooth for dancing, but not distinguished. Among the more tuneful numbers are *This Is Spring*, *Two in a Taxi*, *Clear Out of This World* and *I'm in the Mood*. As for Al Dubin's lyrics, see first paragraph of this article.

Altogether, *Keep Off the Grass* should please the warm-weather customers. It is what they expect New York to be like.

# "Keep Off the Grass"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, May 24, 1940

## 'Keep Off the Grass,' With Jimmie Durante, Opens at the Broadhurst

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

LAST evening's "Keep Off the Grass," which opened at the Broadhurst, pretends no more than to be bright and genial entertainment, filled with the antics of Jimmy Durante, the dancing of Ray Bolger and numerous graceful young things, and enough music to hear by. By a happy coincidence, it is precisely this. Mr. Durante and Mr. Bolger are funny, the dancing is superior and there is always something happening to keep the mind off the war.

Mr. Durante makes a satisfactory number of appearances. He enters eagerly as a tree surgeon and turns up a few minutes later as a fugitive from Esquire fashions.

He is a chaperon of trained monkeys, who scare him into flight, and he, with Iika Chase and Ray Bolger, are mildly riotous as some people called Rhett, Scarlett and Ashley. Who could they be, do you suppose? Mr. Durante, again aided by Miss Chase, is even funnier as a museum guide, and he eventually plays Romeo in a disorderly manner the like of which we haven't seen for days. Mr. Durante gets around, and that's fine. His material isn't always what it might be, but Mr. Durante always is, and it is a bright evening which sees him emerge from hiding.

Mr. Bolger hops and leaps, and acts frantically once or twice and even sings. Most of the singing, however, descends on the pretty shoulders of Jane Froman, who knows what to do with it. A strangely remote young woman named Virginia O'Brien emerges at intervals to sing hilariously, and Larry Adler, who is, I learn, the only harmonica virtuoso to have been invited by Leopold Stokowski to appear as a soloist with the Philadelphia Symphony, plays a harmonica. The Philadelphia Symphony, however, does not appear.

### 'KEEP OFF THE GRASS'

A revue in two acts; music by James McHugh; lyrics by Al Dubin and Howard Dietz; sketches by Mort Lewis, Parke Levy and Alan Lipscomb, S. Jay Kaufman and Panama and Frank; choreography by George Balanchine; book directed and production lighted by Edward Duryea Dowling; costumes and scenery by Nat Karson; presented by the Messrs. Shubert at the Broadhurst Theater on May 23, 1940. In the cast are Jimmy Durante, Ray Bolger, Jane Froman, Iika Chase, Betty Bruce, Nan Rae, Maude Davis, Larry Adler, Virginia O'Brien, John McCauley, Sunnie O'Dea, Jack Gleason, the De Tuscan and others.

You will also be engaged by Miss Betty Bruce, who can tap lyrically with Bolger and alone and with the gaily dressed girls. There are sword dancers, too, and a bright-eyed girl named Sunnie O'Dea, who relieves Miss Bruce as Mr. Bolger's partner. It takes more than one girl to keep up with Mr. Bolger. The dances are staged prettily, and with no pretension, by George Balanchine and, if none of the sets or costumes precisely take your breath, they are almost all agreeable enough. Now and then the sketch writers had an idea, and when they did they usually fell flat over it, as Parke Levy and Alan Lipscomb certainly did when they tried to spoof the Roosevelts. This doesn't seem to matter much. The show scrambles to its feet again and dances on.

No one would call "Keep Off the Grass" epochal, or anything like that. I suppose the squeamish should be warned that it is occasionally a little rough. But everybody else should have a happy, easy-going time at it, letting Durante joke forebodings away for a few brightly lighted hours.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, May 24, 1940

## Durante

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THE great Durante is back in town and therefore, despite the front-page news, things do look a bit brighter this morning. In "Keep Off the Grass," you will find the gentleman with the nose darting about blithely as Dr. Kildare, a friend of Lucius Beebe, Clifton Fadiman, President Roosevelt, Rhett Butler, Romeo and other distinguished personages, thus adding sunniness and gaiety to a workmanlike revue and making the Broadhurst Theater a citadel of hilarity. That excellent dancer, Ray Bolger, is on hand, as are a number of talented and agreeable people, and such matters as songs, dances, costumes and settings are competently arranged, but it is the eminent Mr. Durante—who is the life of the party and makes "Keep Off the Grass" something to see. If, of course, you are not a Durante enthusiast, then you and I shouldn't bother talking to each other.

As for the Durante material, I should say that it was somewhat better in ideas than it is in achievement, but it does possess the immense virtue of providing our hero with a diversity of things to do. I think I enjoyed him most as a fashion plate from cafe society, breaking women's hearts and boasting of his friendship with our Mr. Beebe in an excellent song of Howard Dietz's conception. He is pretty impressive as Clifton Fadiman, too, as he leads a splendid assortment of monkeys, labeled, F. P. A., John Kieran, Oscar Levant, and, of all

people, Dorothy Thompson, in an information quiz. As for his Romeo, with trimmings by Olsen and Johnson, it struck me as being a considerably more appealing conception than Mr. Olivier's. You can imagine what a dashing Rhett Butler he makes. Even so great a man is rather put to it to offer the President and Clarence Day in one amalgamated characterization, but he goes about it nobly.

Second most important to the success of the proceedings is Ray Bolger, who is, as you know, a wonderful dancer and something of a comedian. I prefer Mr. Bolger when his dances are comic, for here he is incomparable. Sometimes he is inclined to grow a bit serious

about his art, as in a number wherein he gravely impersonates the dashing Raffles, and while his work still remains distinguished, it is considerably less exhilarating. In his dancing, Mr. Bolger is assisted chiefly by Miss Betty Bruce and Miss Sunnie O'Dea, who are both helpful. Miss Bruce is a tap dancer of skill and originality and "Keep Off the Grass" provides her with some excellent opportunities. Miss O'Dea is gay and graceful and a pleasant addition to any one's revue. I think she and Mr. Bolger are particularly good in a superior number called "Old Jitterbug."

Most of the singing has been assigned to Miss Jane Froman, who manages a pleasant but fairly undistinguished score agreeably but not very excitingly. I seem to remember "Two in a Taxi" most clearly among her numbers. Six engagingly disreputable-looking individuals add much to the gaiety of the evening by their appearances as veteran cabbies and as park-bench hoboes indulging in song. The program makes it difficult to distinguish between these excellent fellows, but the one who toys gracefully with his sandwich during the park-bench number is a comic pantomimist of rare and splendid skill. Then, there is an odd girl named Virginia O'Brien who sings sentimental songs in a monotone and with what is known in the more cultured circles as a dead pan. You might be surprised to learn that the effect can be original and humorous. One thing about the new revue I take great objection to. It has in the cast a comedienne of striking talent in the person of Miss Iika Chase, and then it refuses to take proper advantage of her great skill. Nat Karson's scenery and costumes are particularly good. Looked at coldly, "Keep Off the Grass" might be considered a fairly routine revue, but thanks to Mr. Durante it is a springtime blessing.

# "Keep Off the Grass"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, May 24, 1940

## Jimmy Durante and Ray Bolger Appear in a Musical Revue Entitled 'Keep Off the Grass'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

PUTTING Jimmy Durante and Ray Bolger together turns out to be a sensible idea in "Keep Off the Grass," which was staged at the Broadhurst last evening. It is a musical revue for the Summer trade, with the accent on vaudeville entertainment, and it gives Durante and Bolger room enough to fool around in. Jane Froman, who is a particularly lovely lady, sings a number of serviceable songs with a grace that is generally superior to her material. Ilka Chase skilfully drops some comic poison around the greensward. On the whole, "Keep Off the Grass" is run-of-the-mire stuff, with a few blatant obscenities that this column could easily get on without. The assembly method of revue-making also grows a little wearisome toward the end. But this is a good time in the history of the world to let Schnozzie Durante and Bouncing Bolger cut loose. They are both in excellent form in this music hall show.

Mr. Durante's comedy flourishes with change of costume. A hard-working clown, always striking the same note of strenuous antics, he needs costumes to evoke a little variety. They have done well by him this time, presenting him in loud vaudeville garments

with huge checks and swagger cuts. As a fugitive from the Esquire fashion-plate he is hilariously clothes conscious. As master of ceremonies for Misinformation Please! he is dressed like Frank Buck. But whatever he wears, he behaves like our old cyclonic Schnozzie, and steams up and down the stage like a hoarse locomotive.

According to the records, Mr. Bolger, the celebrated hooper, has not been around Broadway since "On Your Toes" four years ago. Let's call him the best hooper in the business.

Lean, with small features, amused eyes and a general air of small-town astonishment, he can cut some immediately funny figures in the air. There is nothing much funnier than his desperate galloping when nothing he does seems to succeed in getting his feet on the floor. He dances some crazy steps with Sunnie O'Dea and some furious ones with Betty Bruce. As a superannuated jitterbug he is erroneously entertaining. There is also a Raffles ballet that gives him an opportunity for dramatic dancing. Something appreciative must also be said for a low comedy number with an eccentric bubble-fountain. No hooper can equal Ray Bolger for variety and downright amiability.

Since this is chiefly a saudeville show, you can count on seeing and hearing a few hoboes singing some outrageous ditty on a park bench. Probably you will not pay much attention to the stuff they are singing. For at the end of the bench sits a putty-nosed droll who eats a ham sandwich and then lazily brushes his teeth, which is quite a fine example of classical drama. Every now and then Virginia O'Brien, a dead-pan swing singer, convulses the audience by removing the ecstasy from high-pressure music. Larry Adler plays the harmonica with something like magnificence. Ilka Chase delivers an amazing monologue on flesh in the heat of a passionate scene of lovemaking. José Simon represents manhood and the serious dance with considerable virility.

Now that the opening night is over, the constabulary of "Keep Off the Grass" can do something about that second act. They might roll out the Shakespeare number on the turnbrels. They might also reach back into the first act and destroy the maddening Scarlett O'Hara skit. But let Ray Bolger alone and retain Schnozzie as a lecturer on art at the museum. As a uniformed advocate of the finer things of life, Jimmy is immense.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, May 24, 1940

## "Keep Off the Grass" Opens at the Broadhurst

By JOHN MASON BROWN

WITH Central Park providing most of its scenic continuity, a revue known as "Keep Off the Grass" arrived at the Broadhurst last evening. If it is far from being an inspired affair, this summertime arrival does boast its features which cannot be dismissed as routine. Chief among these, as goes without pointing, are Jimmy Durante's.

Mr. Durante happens to be one of this department's favorites. The mere sight of his Great Profile makes us happy. It is one of the most welcome landmarks on the New York skyline. Mr. Durante's gifts need no trumpeting. He serves himself as his own bugle. His head-shakings, his gleaming eyes, his buzz-saw voice, his linguistic contortions, his pneumatic energy, his beaming smile—all these have long since won him an army of admirers.

There were Durante moments to be treasured last night. Jimmy as a tree doctor—as the Pasture of the pastures; Jimmy as a fugitive from Esquire wondering if his clothes would meet with Lucius Beebe's approval; or the first sight of Jimmy dressed as Romeo are high spots not to be dismissed lightly.

Nor is Ray Bolger to be underestimated as a caperer. He can (especially in the drooler numbers to which his face adjusts itself most readily) step his way with extraordinary efficiency. If he repeats himself, his no doubt is the consolation of knowing that Shakespeare also indulged in repetitions.

Ilka Chase is one of our smartest comedienne. To her eternal credit be it said that she can achieve the manner of comedy even when she has been overlooked by the librettists. Jane Froman is a pleasant singer. Although much of what she has been given to sing in "Keep Off the Grass" sounds to these dull ears like what a hundred others have been asked to sing before her, she rises charmingly to meet the demands of so catchy a tune as "Two in a Taxi."

### A Minority Report

Then there are some laugh-worthy red-nosed comics who appear as a chorus of hansom cabbies and bench squatters. And Maude Davis is on hand to provide a good old vaudeville snicker or two. And at least for one or two numbers Virginia O'Brien's poker-faced singing is entertaining. And José Simon writes again and again in a manner calculated to win the plaudits of Dr. Dittmar.

But, although the audience seemed entirely happy, this chronicler could not help regretting that, as is so often the case with him at musicals, he was not free to leave at the end of the first half. Thereafter the decline he had pretended not to notice in the case of the monkey act billed as "Misinformation Please," and the sour skit on the Roosevelts called "Life With Mother," and the heavy innuendoes of "Rhet, Scarlett and Ashley" became serious, if not chronic.

As a patriot, brought up to believe in the myth of Washington and the cherry tree, this observer must admit the fun began to subside rather uncomfortably after the intermission, that the pattern started to repeat itself painfully, and that a little inspiration would have been welcome. He trusts, however, for everyone concerned his is what is known as a minority report.

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# "At the Stroke of 8"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, May 21, 1940

## 'At the Stroke of Eight,' With Miss Sara Allgood, Opens at the Belasco

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THERE was hardly a dry eye on the stage of the Belasco last evening during the first New York performance of "At the Stroke of Eight," an emotional drama by Percy Robinson. An innocent youth was harried toward the English gallows while the real murderer and his kinfolk suffered agonies of remorse, although they lived in a mansion filled with unfading flowers. Cliches and sobs filled the air, and for a moment or two it looked as if the last-minute reprieve would for once miss its inevitable appointment with melodrama.

Miss Sara Allgood shone through these proceedings. Once or twice, by the sheer power of sincerity, helped considerably by admirable technique, she brought reality into Mr. Robinson's mimic sufferings. Not even an author's bromides can halt Miss Allgood when she gets going properly and when she asks belief in a mother's anguish she asks it with an emotional force which cannot be denied. When she left the stage last evening, however, we were again brought face to face with Mr. Robinson's play.

This is a disconcerting confrontation. In composing his drama Mr. Robinson has tracked to their lairs most of the clichés known to the English language, and to the stage, and brought them back, stuffed. He tells

of the murder of a girl who, trying to support her dying father, was forced to choose between "the streets and the river," and selected the drier alternative. When her body is found, a police inspector follows doubtful clues to the home of a stage Irishwoman and there arrests her son, a lad of almost superhuman innocence. His old mother stands by him, naturally. The real murderer suffers from conscience in the residence of the stately Fairfields, of whom he is a son. His uncle urges him to play the game and finally, as you may guess, he does. Everybody suffers like anything all the way through.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, May 21, 1940

## At the Stroke of 8 New Murder Story

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

IN ITS long journey from the hands of the author, Percy Robinson, to Broadway, where it was produced last night, the play now called "At the Stroke of Eight" has had many adventures, including three changes of titles. The labor devoted to this revision seems to me a decided waste of energy which might better have been directed at rewriting the script. The result, under whatever title, is a melancholy experience.

What we have is a painful and sordid murder story, unrelieved by any imaginative quality, and confused in what slight moral issues it contains. Even a cast containing such expert troupers as Sara Allgood, Reginald Mason and Wallis Clark are bowed down by the sheer drabness of the situations and lines.

Mr. Robinson's play deals with a young man who knows he is guilty of a murder for which another man is to die. He is wealthy, secure from the law and—so he believes—morally guiltless because the deed was committed while he was temporarily insane. He comes to the rescue of the doomed man on the eve of the execution, but not until all the people on the stage and most of those out front have undergone excruciating torture for some three months.

Primarily, I presume, the play was intended to give Miss Allgood a superb opportunity to act the agonized mother. Miss Allgood is always appealing as the poor Irish soul whom the rest of the world is kicking around, and it must be said for her that she did her utmost to make her part in the tragedy genuine in its tenderness and powerful in its emotional impact. But only in one final moment, when she inveighed against the fates for taking her innocent boy from her, could she make her character anything more than the uninspiring figure conceived by Mr. Robinson.

"At the Stroke of Eight" begins unpleasantly, with the view of the murderer's victim on a bed in a cheap lodging house while a particularly brutal police inspector makes a particularly brutal inquiry into the manner of her decease.

Thereafter there is a view of the humble home where the innocent suspect, Tim Nolan, lives with his grand old mother (Miss Allgood) and after that a view of the mansion where the guilty man, Harold Fairfield, lives with his fine old father. The action flits back and forth between the homes, with one side trip to the Old Bailey, where Tim is convicted on evidence, it seems to me, that is so flimsy that the most cold-blooded British barrister would laugh it out of court.

The final act is taken up largely with the remorse of the guilty man and the wavering counsel of his uncle who admits, almost casually, that it is a "rotten sort of thing" to do to let another man hang for one's crime, but who doesn't seem to know quite what to do about it. At last, however, Harold confesses and proves himself a stout fellow by bagging his father's revolver and shooting himself.

The play is not helped to any great degree by the performances in the minor roles. Young Mr. Richard Waring, in the role of the perplexed murderer, plays much as he did in the bombastic character of John Wilkes Booth earlier this season, which was the height of overacting. Miss Valerie Cosart fitted in and out of the scene for no apparent reason at all, while Edward Harvey, as her father, put in a perfunctory appearance on those occasions when the playwright called him in, seemingly because he thought it necessary to fill the stage with people.

### 'AT THE STROKE OF EIGHT'

A play in a prologue and three acts by Percy Robinson, staged by Albert de Courville; settings by L. L. Goldwasser; presented on May 20, 1940, at the Belasco Theater by Joseph M. Gaites and Mr. de Courville. The cast:

|                   |                           |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Mrs. Ellis        | ..... Margaret Moffat     |
| Inspector Jackson | ..... Reynolds Denniston  |
| Constable Hicks   | ..... Ralph Sumpter       |
| Mrs. Nolan        | ..... Sara Allgood        |
| Tim Nolan         | ..... Frank Maxwell       |
| Michael Allen     | ..... Harry Young         |
| Harold Fairfield  | ..... Richard Waring      |
| Nichols           | ..... J. C. Dunn          |
| Dr. Barton        | ..... Edward Harvey       |
| Thomas Fairfield  | ..... Reginald Mason      |
| George Hope       | ..... Wallis Clark        |
| Madge Barton      | ..... Valerie Cosart      |
| Sergeant Brown    | ..... Byron Russell       |
| Father Collins    | ..... Laurence C. O'Brien |
| Mrs. Driscoll     | ..... Grania O'Malley     |
| Old Ryan          | ..... Hale Norcross       |

Nothing in the writing or the direction enlivens this or brings any reality to it. From the first to last "At the Stroke of Eight" is a staid page from the theater's memory book, arbitrarily designed to move the eyes. Only Miss Allgood makes any particular headway against the lachrymose script. Richard Waring is occasionally forceful as the real murderer and Reginald Mason and Wallis Clark keep their pipes going well while they thoughtfully utter the obvious. Miss Valerie Cosart, popping in and out as love interest, is cast in one of the season's most unwarding roles and seems uneasily aware of it. But nobody associated, even indirectly, with "At the Stroke of Eight" can really be called lucky.

Reprinted from

NEW YORK TIMES

May 21, 1940.

## Study in Perpetual Motion

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IF SOME impetuous producer had put on Percy Robinson's "At the Stroke of Eight" without reading it, a haunted theatrogoer might feel easier of mind.

But producers have been putting it through laboratory tests for twelve years. It opened originally in London in 1928. It was tested in the Spring of 1930 in Pasadena and in the Autumn of 1930 in Boston. Last evening it was given a final test at the Belasco Theatre, where the resistance of an audience was tested just short of the breaking point.

For "At the Stroke of Eight" is one of those public fatalities in which a playwright contrives a dreadful situation in the first act and proceeds to sigh and wait about it until closing time. Mr. Robinson affably accuses the wrong boy of a murder in the first act. For the rest of the evening he toys with the weird state of mind of the boy who committed the murder and is hiding. The play would be morbid if it were not so overwhelmingly dull.

Sara Allgood is expertly in it, wringing her hands and suffering the tortures of the damned as mother of the innocent party. Richard Waring is also satisfactory as the guilty party in person. A number of other actors stride anxiously up and down the living room, pouring out whisky when they do not have their hands in their pockets or are not tapping their foreheads thoughtfully. Now, after twelve years of inquiry, every one can see that "At the Stroke of Eight" is not worth doing. "Call it an experiment in commercialism," the man with the beard said after the second act.



# "At the Stroke of 8"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, May 21, 1940

## "At the Stroke of 8" Brings Justice Back To Forty-fourth St.

"At the Stroke of 8," drama by Percy Robinson. Produced by Joseph M. Gaites and Albert de Courville at the Belasco Theatre, New York, May 20, 1940.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

**A**T THE stroke of 9 a girl who wanted to be a writer but had to take to the streets to support an indigent father is found dead in her bed in a London lodging house.

At the stroke of 9:15 the police have discovered marks on her throat indicating that she has been choked to death.

At the stroke of 9:30 an innocent Irish lad has been charged with the crime on circumstantial evidence as artificially planned as Percy Robinson, the author, can plan it.

At the stroke of 9:45 a well-born neurotic, given to an occasional mental aberration, has confessed to his father and his uncle that he is the guilty party and what can he do about it?

At the stroke of 10:15 they have told the conscience-stricken murderer that the innocent on trial has been found guilty of the crime.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, May 21, 1940

## Capital Punishment

By RICHARD WATTS Jr.

**T**WELVE years ago this serious-minded and thoroughly dull melodramatic assault on capital punishment was produced in London under the title of "To What Red Hell." Even then it must have seemed a strangely outmoded work. Now, disguised as "At the Stroke of Eight," it is so decrepit it fairly creaks as it strives in earnest and hysterical fashion to read us a little lesson about the evil of taking life legally. It is all about an unoffending prostitute who is strangled and an innocent Irish boy who almost goes to his death for the crime, and a guilty English boy who suffers torments of conscience before confessing his act, only to have the young Irishman come close to death anyway because the British Home Secretary is away on a week end. It is painful in its detail, but even more so in the ineptness of its writing.

If these were less serious times in the history of the world you might find a certain fun in contemplating this work by Percy Robinson as an anti-British parable of governmental inefficiency. When, just as things

were about to reach a happy ending and the innocent boy was to be freed, it was discovered that the Home Secretary was out of town and the Irishman would have to die despite the real killer's confession, it struck me that the author was being pretty bitter about his country, but at the last minute the reprieve reached the prison and the parable took an encouraging turn. The English, Mr.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, May 21, 1940

## "At the Stroke of 8" Arrives at the Belasco

By WILLELLA WALDORF

**F**OR some reason that is not entirely clear, Broadway has been subjected this season to an invasion of British murder melodramas, only one of which, "Ladies in Retirement," has had anything approaching success. Some of them go in for court-room scenes, complete with be-wigged K. C.'s and Cockney comic relief. Others serve up the hysteria in an ante-room of the Old Bailey. Still others stay away from court altogether and content themselves with harrowing the audience merely by getting the verdict over the telephone, or on the wireless.

"At the Stroke of Eight," which opened last night at the Belasco Theatre—late last season vacated by John Barrymore and "My Dear Children"—was first produced in England in 1928 under the title "To What Red Hell." Sara Allgood played the Irish mother then and she does so now. Miss Allgood is always highly competent and she is aided by a capable enough cast, but there is simply nothing any

of the players can do to disguise the fact that "At the Stroke of Eight" is routine melodrama, whose mechanics are so creaky that it is difficult to stir up much interest in the fate of young Tim Nolan, a broth of a boy,

### Hysterics at 11

At the stroke of 10:30 the innocent boy's mother has had hysterics and is led pathetically away, and at the stroke of 11 God is found still to be in His Heaven and the Irish mother is sorry for all the things she said denying His existence.

All these strokes are part of the drama called "At the Stroke of 8," which was played at the Belasco Theatre last night by a competent but impotent cast.

I cannot believe that anybody cares very much. It is one of those pattern dramas that is so obviously written to order that there is neither life nor good artificial suspense in it.

Sara Allgood probably fakes it, seeing that it gives her a chance as the distraught mother to act her three scenes with the beautiful sincerity of which she is capable.

Richard Waring may like it, because as the conscience-torn neurotic he, too, is given a chance to act that is fairly impressive. And right well does he take advantage of it.

### What If Nobody Cares?

I cannot believe the others care very much. Their parts are sketchy and stiffly set in the melodrama mold.

And I'm quite sure audiences are not going to care, seeing they have seen dozens and dozens of better dramas told on the screen for a third the price of tickets to the Belasco.

There are nice short performances by Frances Nolan as the innocent, Margaret Moffatt as an excited charwoman, Laurence O'Brien as a worried priest, Wallis Clark as a troubled uncle and Valerie Cossart as a puzzled romantic interest.

Albert de Courville, co-producer with Joseph Gaites, did the directing, keeping it as sane and simple as possible, and settings by L. L. Goldwasser serve nicely.

"At the Stroke of 8" was tried twice in London ten and twelve years ago. I don't know just why it was again revived at this time.

Robinson seemed to be saying, do come through at the last moment. That is the only hopeful section of the play, for the rest of it is as gloomy as it is undramatic. Since the author never appears to know whether he is chiefly interested in the plight of the innocent boy's mother or in the soul writhings of the guilty man, the spectator is likely to compromise by ignoring both aspects of the tale.

The only authentic tragedy of "At the Stroke of Eight" lies in the sight of that splendid actress, Miss Sara Allgood, whose performance in "Juno and the Paycock" is one of the great memories of the dramatic season, wasting her time in such trash. If any actress in the world could make the fatuous dialogue of Mr. Robinson's play seem believable and moving it would be Miss Allgood, but not even she can carry the burden of such talk for long. Yet her portrayal of the unhappy mother of the innocent youth gives the only dignity to the evening. Frank Maxwell plays his one scene as the young Irishman effectively and Richard Waring is strenuously soul-torn as the actual killer—who was, you will be glad to learn, a good boy at heart, but given to moments of madness that his dotting family had kept from him. The other players take their activities as seriously as possible. "At the Stroke of Eight" shows us the waning dramatic season in a dismal light.

who is tried and found guilty and almost hanged for a murder another boy committed.

The boy who did the deed was not in his right mind when he did it, and the audience is generously permitted to follow the agony of two families, that of the upper-class Fairfields, whose son actually committed the crime, and that of the Irish Nolans. It is piled on up to the very end, becoming a little silly as the complications grow. They did spare us a court-room scene, however, but we did follow Miss Allgood to an ante-room of the Old Bailey.

This is the sort of thing that, if it must be done, is already being done adequately by Grade B films. For those who will never get enough of it, and who enjoy a good cry over an Irish mother's woes, "At the Stroke of Eight" will probably supply an opportunity to sniff, if the potential sniffers can afford the theatrical tariff. We might add that the curtain rises on the corpse of a young lady in bed. A police inspector, probably related to Lestrade of Sherlock Holmes fame, jumps at the conclusion that she has committed suicide by gas until it occurs to him some time later to wonder what the marks on her throat signify.

Nobody likes a good murder mystery better than this reviewer, but we haven't seen one in some time.

# "The Return of the Vagabond"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, May 14, 1940

## 'The Return of the Vagabond,' With George M. Cohan, Opens at the National

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

**G**EORGE M. COHAN jogged along affably last evening at the National Theater, talking to fragments of his imagination and to the audience and elaborately capturing bank robbers under circumstances of burlesqued improbability. He speculated on life and the theater, punned and pranced and announced that drama is all around us and everywhere we go. It seems too unkind to suggest that to this last theorem the National Theater is at the moment an exception.

Mr. Cohan has written himself a play of sorts. He calls it "The Return of the Vagabond," and it is a sequel to "The Tavern," of pleasant memory to those who saw it first in 1920 and agreeable enough in retrospect to those of us who saw it when it was revived ten years later. Like its predecessor, "The Return of the Vagabond" ambles and jokes and makes fun of itself. But the gusto of the original is lacking. The mood is friendly still and Mr. Cohan is always to be admired. But his play is aimless and long-winded, and only occasionally comical.

A good many of "The Tavern's" characters are back, and the scene is still the same. The Governor's daughter is married now, and so is Zach, the landlord's son. The Vagabond comes singing back in a furious thun-

derstorm, which roars and blusters when characters enter and when they leave. Odd people wander in—a female impersonator, a dwarf, numerous and ludicrous representatives of the law and a banker whose tilla have just been rifled. Mr. Cohan sorts these characters out and locks up the ones who should be locked up and makes long, gentle addresses. A good part of his that is directed disarmingly to the audience.

Mr. Cohan is himself so disarming and so essentially gay that it is impossible to quarrel with him. In the theater he is a gentle friend,

### 'THE RETURN OF THE VAGABOND'

A play in two acts by George M. Cohan; directed by Sam Forrest; setting by Odan Waller; presented on May 13, 1940, at the National Theater, with the following cast:

|                          |                   |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| The Vagabond.....        | Mr. Cohan         |
| The Governor.....        | McKay Morris      |
| His Wife.....            | Marie Louise Dana |
| His Daughter.....        | Celeste Holm      |
| His Son-in-Law.....      | John Moray        |
| The Tavern Keeper.....   | E. J. Blunkall    |
| His Son.....             | Fred Herrick      |
| His Daughter-in-Law..... | Gretchen Davidson |
| The Italian.....         | Joe Verdi         |
| The Doctor.....          | John Cherry       |
| The Banker.....          | Florenz Ames      |
| The Sheriff.....         | Edward McNamara   |
| The Captain.....         | Len Hallister     |
| His Assistant.....       | George Leach      |
| A Stranger.....          | Dona McClelland   |
| A Little Stranger.....   | George Thornton   |
| The Cop.....             | George W. Smith   |
| Another Stranger.....    | Marshall Bradford |
| The Coachman.....        | Henry Sherwood    |

who deserves the utmost in cordiality. But the simple fact is that he does not always write very good plays for himself. "The Return of the Vagabond" falls far short of what he deserves as an actor. It also falls a good deal short of what the audience deserves. Mr. Cohan and his fellow players are its only charm.

McKay Morris is found as the Governor and Miss Celeste Holm is prettily engaging as his daughter. Fred Herrick is appropriately startled as the landlord's son, and Edward McNamara properly, and comically, imposing as the sheriff. All the others deserve approval and the wish that they, with Mr. Cohan, were in a livelier play.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, May 14, 1940

## Cohan in "The Return of the Vagabond"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

**G**EORGE M. COHAN paid his second visit to "The Tavern" last evening. And some of us, treasuring the memory of previous happy sojourns in the company both of Arnold Daly and of Mr. Cohan at this same storm-tossed hostelry, were forced to regret "The Return of the Vagabond." Worse than that, in the celebrated phrase of the hired man killed off in Mr. Cohan's earlier tale of this wayside inn, we were compelled to keep on asking, "What's all the shootin' fer?"

Mr. Cohan is an actor to whom one takes out an oath of allegiance as gladly as to the flag. His caperings, his head-tossings, his eye-rollings, his winks, his jauntiness, his winning personality, his authoritative friendliness, and his jovial habit of laying a finger aside of his nose like a smooth-shaven Santa Claus, free to choose a better exit than a chimney—all these have long since turned us all into devoted Cohanians.

We have not really minded when he has gone Broadway Pirandello in a big way. We have rallied round his high-flying flag. For we are devoted Cohan fans, make no mistake about it, even if "The Return of the Vagabond" drives us just now into temporary disloyalty.

### "The Tavern" Revisited

The inn at the National is the same as it was in "The Tavern" when Mr. Daly and Mr.

Cohan first visited it. The wind blows as fearfully offstage as it ever did. The rain is no less heavy. The governor, his lady, their daughter, the unprepossessing young man who has become her husband, the landlord, his son, his son's wife, and Mr. Cohan as the mysterious wanderer are all of them once again on hand. And some new wicked characters and constables also appear.

This time, however, the evening spent at the tavern is not a happy one. The spoofing has lost its relish, the joke its point. Choose any image you may fancy. Say the wine is flat, the bread has staled, the needle has become blunted, the pouffe has fallen—and, alas, the truth will be your teammate.

Mr. Cohan is all over the stage. Laughingly he gives himself an entrance such as every actor must dream of. If he swaggers on as an elusive Mr. Fix-It, he falls to fix things thereafter either quite for himself or for his audience. What he gives himself to do is hardly worth the doing. What he gives himself to say is certainly not all of it worth the saying.

### Mr. Cohan as a Host

In a script formless enough to have been by Saroyan but without Mr. Saroyan's redeeming imagination, Mr. Cohan indulges in enough comments to the audience to make Mr. Barrymore happy. He is in more of a stage-struck than a dramatic frame of mind. Like the good showman he is, his heart belongs to the theatre. All the roads of his thinking lead to Broadway. Ibsen, Joseph Jefferson, and the tricks of his trade are at more than the bottom of what he has to say. His tone is almost wearisomely confidential. Although he keeps on promising something melodramatic is about to happen, nothing does happen that you have not long since guessed and never cared about. The evening is more impersonal personal history than a play.

Mr. Cohan works unsparingly, proving once again how amazing is his physical dexterity even if some of his jokes are not quite so light on their feet. Such dependables as McKay Morris, Joe Verdi, John Cherry, and Edward McNamara are present to give centre stage to Mr. Cohan. Yet in spite of the fact that he occupies it almost continuously, the tavern no longer proves as hospitable as it once was. At least this tourist was not accommodated, in spite of his fondness for Mr. Cohan as a dramatic landlord.

# "The Return of the Vagabond"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, May 14, 1940

## The Return of the Vagabond Full of Terror, Suspense

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

**I**N *The Return of the Vagabond*, George M. Cohan's sequel, to that great success of yester-year called *The Tavern*, Mr. Cohan's gay and impudent wanderer spends another melodramatic night in the storm-shaken inn, this time breaking up a gang of bank robbers before his final exit into the mysterious night.

Mr. Cohan calls the new work "an American melodramatic satire." To me it seemed like a combination of Saroyan and John Barrymore, and it may well be that the incorrigible showman is both writing and playing with his tongue in his cheek—that with the infinite wisdom of his years, he actually believes that this is what our theater is coming to.

Great pains are taken to build up an atmosphere of suspense and terror. You never heard such thunder or saw such lightning; never did the wind howl more dimly; never were there such banging of doors and shutters, or such startling raps on the outer door. But after the creation of a receptive state of mind in the audience to almost any hideous crime, nothing very important seems to happen, and the action bogs down through a greater part of the play.

There is, of course, considerable charm in Mr. Cohan's amiable lunacies, and his general spryness and agility, his light step and

merry tunes, his brisk little dancings and prancings never cease to be amazing. Like Mr. Barrymore, he takes his audience into his confidence. His asides and his critical comments on the play itself have been deliberately written in to give him an opportunity to smile and wink at his friends out front and to advise them that he is having a grand time at play-acting. There is also opportunity for him to tell the world just what he thinks of the theatrical business in general. And from his remarks I would hazard a guess that he has a serious case of nostalgia—that he is longing for a return of the good old days.

There are some Saroyanesque characters

in "The Return of the Vagabond." Among them are a dwarf and a female impersonator and a gentleman with a black beard, all of whom are inept and bungling bank robbers. There are two Keystone cops and a comedy sheriff, an Italian livery stable hand and a nervous bridegroom who hides under the bed every time there is a lightning flash, a circumstance which keeps him out of sight during a greater part of the play. There is a frantic doctor who skips pleasantly about and a sour and disheartened banker. And, of the characters who visited the Tavern on the first occasion, the Governor, his wife and daughter, and, of course, the innkeeper and his son.

It would be pleasant to be able to say that all these interesting figures helped to keep the play lively. Unfortunately, I can only report that except during some scattering episodes, their humor was not forceful enough to give the show the pace it needed, and the net result was strangely disappointing.

Mr. Cohan's genial cockiness, his easy manner and the sureness and skill with which he plays the Vagabond still make him an attractive player; however, and my mention of the Barrymore phase does not imply any similarity between the antics of "My Dear Children" and those of "The Return of the Vagabond."

An excellent cast supports the star. McKay Morris makes a personable and more than agreeable Governor, and E. J. Blunkall does an excellent piece of work as the tavernkeeper. The beautiful Celeste Holm is seen to advantage as the governor's daughter and Fred Herrick is effective as the tavernkeeper's son. Joe Verdi puts good comedy into the part of the Italian stable hand, and John Cherry is sprightly as the doctor.

In short, "The Return of the Vagabond" is faintly amusing and it has Mr. Cohan's lively personality as its greatest asset. But it is not the play its daddy was.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, May 14, 1940

## Back at the Tavern

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

**I**T IS always such a pleasure to have George M. Cohan back with us that it may seem particularly capricious to complain about his vehicle. Somehow, though, there was reason to hope for so much from "The Return of the Vagabond" that the results are bound to be depressing. Here was to be Mr. Cohan's own sequel to his celebrated satirical success of twenty years ago, "The Tavern," and in it, we were told, the great man would be found laughing at life and letters, as he poked fun at melodrama, love-making, fantasy, philosophy and the recent trends in the theater. Instead, he is to be encountered in his new work indulging in some rather mild and pointless fooling, playing, of course, with the charm and guile of which only he is capable, but managing to give but intermittent life to a jest that has grown stale.

The formula of the current work is safely after the fashion of "The Tavern," which means that the scene is an ancient inn on a stormy night in some historical period of an uncertain era. The governor and his wife, his daughter and son-in-law, the innkeeper, his son and his daughter-in-law, all characters from the earlier work, are gathered

there omnibusly, when amid an incredible fury of thunder and lightning there enters Mr. Cohan, the mysterious vagabond with the green cloak, the floppy hat and the amiable grin. "Gad," he cries, "what an entrance!" and you expect the fun to begin. That is the sad part of the thing. There is occasional laughter and a few flashes of wit and wisdom, while melodrama darts merrily about from time to time, but the hilarity never gets started.

At first it seems likely that Mr. Cohan is

bent on having his satirical say on the state of the theater. He frowns a bit at Ibsen, declares that the current drama is too interested in sex and propaganda, has a sentimental word for James O'Neill and laughs at the business of acting and melodramatics, but, just as some of us veterans were beginning to hope that he would give us a few of his parodies of celebrated stage successes of the day, in the manner he managed so brilliantly in those historic Cohan Revues, he dropped the whole idea and went in for aimless burlesque melodrama about bank robbers. Mr. Cohan is such a wise theater man that even here he is funny from time to time, but, on the whole, the comedy seems strangely feeble and the amiably philosophical interludes grow thin and ineffectual. The sad truth is that "The Return of the Vagabond" is not very entertaining.

Seekers after hidden satirical import felt sure that there were scenes, particularly a sort of love interlude with the heroine, in which Mr. Cohan was poking fun at Saroyan, but I must say that if this is what he was doing he was unhappily ineffectual about it. Let us rather turn from Cohan, the author, to Cohan, the actor, for here he is as beguiling as ever. For even if he does not write all the proper speeches for the Vagabond he can play him with the zest, humor and impishness that are characteristically his. The supporting cast hasn't a great deal to do, but all of the minor players from McKay Morris as the Governor to Edward McNamara as the Sheriff, appear to be properly helpful. Mr. Cohan remains one of the great men of the theater, but even he, it seems, can slip at times.



# "The Return of the Vagabond"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, May 14, 1940

## "The Return of the Vagabond" A Personal Lark for Geo. Cohan

"The Return of the Vagabond," a melodramatic satire, written and produced by George M. Cohan at the National Theatre, New York, May 12, 1940.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

"YOU know what I call him?" Harry Hershfield was saying at the National Theatre last night, answering himself almost immediately: "George M. Saroyan." Which won't please George overmuch. Nor William Saroyan, either.

"The Return of the Vagabond" presents Mr. Cohan on another binge, and does take on certain aspects of the Saroyan goofiness. This can pass for subtle satire or an expression of originality and freshness of attack in the theatre. Depending on your reaction to the Saranolic drama.

Like all sequels, "The Return of the Vagabond" was fated to miss the impact of novelty that helped its model and inspiration. Those who recall that exercise in stage kidding as among the happiest of their play-going adventures are pretty sure to be disappointed.

And those who have since had their first meeting with the Saroyan use of the same plotless and formless type of stage entertainment will probably prefer their newest idol.

### Started With Cohan

However, it was George's joke originally. He was the lad who took a straight melodrama written by Cora Dent Gantt, which Brock Pemberton brought to him, and made a happy burlesque of it.

Arnold Daly played the name part first in

September, 1926. The following Spring George went into the cast. He also revived the piece in the Spring of 1930.

Never having been one of the "Tavern" enthusiasts, I have missed the satisfactions of those who were. Its satire has always been a little obvious and somewhat labored to me.

In the original version, as I recall it, there was some little attempt to bring about a logical conclusion by having the guards of a sanitarium come in search of certain of the characters at the play's end.

In "The Return of the Vagabond" Mr. Cohan drops into the same old Tavern for a second adventure with the same characters, and plays the evening through as the happy irresponsible who may any moment step

down to the footlights to confide an author's secret to the audience. The only missing favorite is the old fellow who wanted to know what all the shootin' was for.

Cohan works in a burlesque bank robbery, with two of the robbers escaping as a pair resembling "Mamma and the Midget" in the current adventures of Chester Gould's "Dick Tracy" cartoon. This adds a certain liveliness to the last half of the evening.

### Cohan Philosophy

There are flashes of the Cohan philosophy as well as the Cohan emotion to the old theatre. He recites a verse of his youth, "Myself and Me," and bows before one of those happy sentimental exit speeches about the Master Dramatist.

He plays the Vagabond with the same relish that he has always had for the part. It is a personal lark with George and he loves it. His voice is muffled by what appears to be a slight throat trouble right now, but that will clear.

The Cohan company includes McKay Morris as the Governor and Celeste Holm as his pretty daughter. Daughter is married now to a nervous and lightly hysterical bridegroom who, during the storm, prefers to stay under his bridal bed in place of in it.

Gretchen Davidson does nicely as a daughter-in-law. E. J. Blunkall is the Tavern keeper, Joe Verdi an excitable Italian hired hand, and Edward McNamara has a few good moments as a broad-shouldered sheriff.

There are several good hits, too. Oden Waller has repeated the old Tavern setting and Sam Forrest has kept the direction in the spirit of the 1926 production.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, May 14, 1940

## George M. Cohan Offers 'The Return of the Vagabond' as Sequel to 'The Tavern'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

GEORGE M. COHAN is making it hard for us this morning. Although the Prince of Broadway deserves homage from his subjects, "The Return of the Vagabond" is difficult to salute. In the program of the National, where it was acted last evening, Mr. Cohan describes it as "American melodramatic satire" and also as a "second visit to 'The Tavern.'" Having nothing else in hand for the moment, he has been meditating fondly on the humors of the Cora Dick Gantt melodrama in which he appeared twenty years ago. He is using the same romantic setting. He has reassembled the same queer characters. But Mr. Cohan's improvisations are feeble and his lines are wordy. In spite of his buoyant and jaunty manner, Mr. Cohan has very little to give this play. Write it off to the profit and loss account of an honorable career on Broadway.

Many people were never quite sure twenty

years ago whether "The Tavern" was originally intended as hokum melodrama or a burlesque on hokum melodrama. But there is no doubt about the motive of "The Return of the Vagabond." Mr. Cohan is offering it as impish make-believe. He makes his entrance

in the midst of a crashing thunderstorm and greets the old characters of "The Tavern." Stepping in and out of the play, sometimes as the mysterious vagabond and sometimes as George M. Cohan in person, he proceeds to improvise a play on the spur of the moment. Before the evening is over he has knocked something together about three bank robbers whom he daringly unmasks, captures and delivers over to the police. Having written his show, he makes a grandiloquent exit and presently rings down the curtain romantically.

Mr. Cohan does not care much for modern drama. He still looks back affectionately on the days when the theatre was penny plain and tuppence colored. He was the good genius of that golden era—humorous, kindly, simple in his methods. No one can blame him for his streak of nostalgia. Bits of the old song and dance style turn up in his current escapade. But his cleverness is not sprightly enough to disguise the dismal fact that "The Return of the Vagabond" is a barren script with nothing to give except the gallant charm of Mr. Cohan's unconquerable personality.

In recent years he has been most enjoyable in plays by other hands. O'Neill's "Ah, Wilderness!" and the Kaufman and Hart "I'd Rather Be Right" have done as much for him as he has done for them. His own plays have been a little half-hearted and wistfully reminiscent. "The Return of the Vagabond," fanciful and skittish, is the weakest of his latter-day discursions.

# "Romeo and Juliet"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, May 10, 1940

## Olivier and Leigh Act the Title Roles in a Revival of Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet' at the Fifty-first Street Theatre

By BROOKS ATKINSON

MUCH scenery: no play. Let that serve as capsule comment on the "Romeo and Juliet" which Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh brought to the Fifty-first Street Theatre last evening. After dreaming of the ideal production of Shakespeare's romantic tragedy for a long time, Mr. Olivier has at last mounted it lavishly with solidly constructed sets on a revolving stage and "all the accoutrements of an opulent production. He has designed it; he has directed the performance. As Romeo he is appearing in a part in which he has already distinguished himself in England. But somewhere amidst his herculean labors Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" has become completely lost. Excepting a stray scene or two, very little of it can be heard. None of it recaptures the heat and passion of the tragedy. Although Miss Leigh and Mr. Olivier are handsome young people, they hardly act the parts at all, and Mr. Olivier in particular keeps throwing his part away.

His only passion is one for detail. In twenty-one pedantically staged scenes he has gone through the text with an eye for spectacle. Everything is solid; the doors close with a proper bang; the hardware makes an honest rattle. The costuming is full of splendor, and Robert Edmond Jones's lighting follows the clock around accurately and handsomely. Bells ring off stage. The orchestra is busy all evening with music and "traditional airs." Palestrina chants point up the religious episodes. But you cannot have this sort of spectacle and a play at the same time. To mount it Mr. Olivier has had to set it deep in the stage, where the mechanical equipment moves easily. Even from the or-

chestra seats the performance seems remote from the stage and too far away to be heard. Mr. Olivier's industry is more admirable than his judgment.

Miss Leigh's slender, girlish beauty is perfect for Juliet. Fourteen years are not too few for the willowy innocence of her personality. Let it also be said in her favor that she makes an earnest attempt to act the part as it was written. But she is not yet accomplished enough as an actress to go deep into the heart of an imaginative character wrought out of sensuous poetry.

Mr. Olivier is more gifted personally than most actors who play the part of Romeo. And he is also a widely experienced actor. The superficiality of his acting is difficult to understand. He is mannered and affected, avoiding directness in even simple episodes. In costumes that flare extravagantly at the shoulders, he looks like a belligerent sparrow when he scurries across the stage. Most of the time he speaks for Juliet's private ear,

dropping his voice at the end of the lines as though they did not matter. As his own director, Mr. Olivier has never seen or heard himself in the performance. That is just as well. He would be astonished if he did.

Some of the acting is audible and some of the characters are defined intelligibly. Wesley Addy's Benvolio is spoken like a man with volume and candor. As Capulet's family errand boy, Raymond Johnson conveys the dazed foolishness of a Shakespearean clown. Theatregoers can be especially grateful for the workmanlike acting of Dame May Whitty as the nurse, of Halliwell Hobbes as Capulet and of Alexander Knox as Friar Laurence. They take the audience into their confidence, which is a merciful thing to do, and play character with vigor and frankness. But Edward O'Brien, who once did an excellent Prince Hal for Maurice Evans, plays Mercutio like some private joke and puts the Queen Mab speech under his atom-crusher. Flying in the face of nature, Mercutio does not come to life until he is mortally wounded, although even then he chokes himself on the dying lines.

An enormous amount of labor has gone into this production, but I doubt it would be vulgar to mention the money. But there is no avoiding the plain fact that the result is lamentable. Swallowed up in heavy scenery, this "Romeo and Juliet" is tepid and tedious. "Two hours traffic on the stage," Shakespeare promises in the prologue. After trying to eavesdrop on it for three hours last evening, this theatregoer departed, but the traffic was still heavy and tangled.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, May 10, 1940

## Olivier's Romeo and Juliet Extravagant Production

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

MR. LAURENCE OLIVIER'S new stage production of Romeo and Juliet, which opened last night with considerable fanfare at the 51st Street Theater, is quite as long as Gone With the Wind, but despite the presence of the graceful and youthful British star, Miss Vivien Leigh, it lacks an Atlanta fire or a mile of red-carpeted stairs to make it as exciting.

For the courage Mr. Olivier displays in presenting this extravagantly mounted production one must have respect. It is gorgeously costumed and designed with sweeping boldness. It is a full-tooth full-version of Shakespeare's tender tragedy,

and it boasts in its cast certain excellent players. Mr. Olivier, too, has the virtue of looking the part of the lovelorn young Montague but at that point, it seems to me, we reach the end of the play's definite assets.

The great fault of the production lies in the unintelligible delivery of lines, with Mr. Olivier himself the chief offender. Far from overcoming a distressing problem in acoustics, which resulted in blanketing the lower part of the house at times, Mr. Olivier's voice was so muffled and he mouthed and chewed his words so continuously that following him became a strain rather than a pleasure.

This unfortunate method of delivery, descending to others of the cast through Mr. Olivier's direction, obstructed the flow of

the play, halted its action even in its most tempestuous moments and was largely responsible for the restlessness that was manifest on this side of the footlights.

There were, I am glad to say, exceptions to this. Alexander Knox's performance as Friar Laurence was one of these. Mr. Knox's enunciation was clear, precise, musical and altogether a delight to hear. Beyond that, he played the role with rare dignity and ease. Those were other veterans who refused to "saw the air or tear a passion to tatters." Dame May Whitty gave a sound performance of the Nurse, Halliwell Hobbes, out of a long Shakespearean experience, blended certain comedy with the tragedy of his role as Capulet, which relieved the picture. Wesley Addy, who made such an excellent Hot-

spur last year in the Maurice Evans production of Henry IV, played Benvolio with all the appealing personality that is naturally his.

There was plenty of bounce, too, in the performance of Edmond O'Brien as the lusty blade, Mercutio, but here again the player seemed to have succumbed to the example in muffled diction supplied by Mr. Olivier, and many of his better speeches hence were lost to the audience. Cornel Wilde was a vigorous Tybalt, and Raymond Johnson contributed a charming performance of Peter Capulet's servant.

Miss Leigh's interpretation of Juliet had the advantage of fresh youthfulness which has not always been a marked attribute of past Juliets. The balcony scene (from her side of the railing, at least) was played with pleasant restraint and a joyousness that was neither coy nor kitchy. The scene in which she takes the sleeping draught was managed well until the last few moments, when she gave in to the temptation of theatricalism. Altogether she is a charming little Juliet but not yet a great one.

Mr. Olivier's designs run strangely from the heavy Italian architecture to some scenes that have all the bright beauty (to our eyes at least) of a millionaire's modernistic summer home. The garden scene, with its light wrought iron balcony leading from a round, silk-draped bay was particularly effective. Friar Laurence's "room" was not a cell, but a pleasant corner in a monastery garden. The tomb was a well contrived and realistically built scene on two levels. All of the settings, in fact, were highly interesting.

It is unfortunate, therefore, to have to say that so much well-intended effort and such a bold venture should come to such a dull result. But four uninvited spectators, peering through a door on the fire-escape and thereafter falling with a hideous clatter down the iron stairs just as Miss Leigh was taking her sleeping powder, caused far more excitement than almost anything that happened on the stage between the hours of 8 p. m. and 11:45.

# "Romeo and Juliet"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, May 10, 1940

## 'Romeo and Juliet,' With Olivier and Leigh, Opens at the Fifty-first Street

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

LAURENCE OLIVIER and Vivien Leigh acted "Romeo and Juliet" last evening at the Fifty-first Street Theater and, by dint of hurrying, got through the whole of it between 8:15 and about a quarter of 12. Miss Leigh is a very pretty Juliet, charmingly youthful, and as her lover Mr. Olivier is handsome and graceful. These are pleasant qualities, but apparently not quite enough for poetic tragedy.

It is difficult for modern actors to abandon prose for poetry and reasonably good ones often boggle it. Both Miss Leigh and Mr. Olivier boggle it rather badly. Miss Leigh by tripping blithely along at a healthy canter and Mr. Olivier by biting it into convenient, prose-like morsels, and indicating his recognition of the tragic mood by gesticulation so sweeping that it once or twice threatened to unbalance him. Neither of these methods works very well in "Romeo and Juliet," which is a tragic song, full of music and lovely phrases and the mistiness of a young dream.

Of the two, Miss Leigh is rather the more successful. She dashes through the poetry, including the lovely lines of the balcony scene, with little indication that she is ever bothered to understand them. But in her emotional scenes she does get, if not Juliet, an intensity of feeling and she is once or twice very moving. She is always fragile and lovely to look at and by her appearance suggests something of the youthful tenderness and eagerness which should be among the qualities of the fourteen-year-old girl to whom Shakespeare, in defiance of all the probabilities save those of poetry, gave such eloquence and richness of emotion.

Mr. Olivier's Romeo is, I am afraid, little more than nervous. He plays restlessly, with an excitement which does not seem much like the impetuosity it is no doubt supposed

to indicate. He hardly gives himself time, amid his eager dartings and sweeping movements, to say his lines, and he manages, in fact, to swallow a good many of them. Shakespeare should be acted and not intoned, certainly, but there should be a middle ground somewhere between solemnity and acrobatics. And if he insists on having music to underline the emotional scenes, he will have to learn to speak above it. I think the music is a rather quaint idea myself.

The production as a whole is cramped, in spite of the enormous stage available, and Mr. Olivier's direction is as restless as his acting. There is little quietness and no spaciousness in it, and several excellent players in the supporting cast are more or less lost. Dame May Whitty, playing the nurse, triumphs more often over the confusion than any one else, including the stars, and Halliwell Hobbes generally manages to dominate it as Capulet.

But Edmond O'Brien's vigorous Mercutio is more or less lost in the shuffle and Alexander Knox's considered Friar Laurence is overwhelmed. The rest play with modera-

### 'ROMEO AND JULIET'

Shakespeare's tragedy, arranged in three acts and twenty-one scenes; directed and presented at the Fifty-first Street Theater on May 9, 1940, by Laurence Olivier; scenery and costumes by Motley; lighting by Robert Edmond Jones. The cast: Chorus, Prince Escalus, Wilton Graft; Watchman, Morton L. Stevens; A Friar, Earle Grey; Two Church-going Women, Clara Speer, Nan Merriman; A Collier, Oliver Cliff; Sampson, William Barrows; Gregory, Joseph Tomas; Abraham, Robert Busch; Balbasar, Jack Merivale; Chief Officer of the Town, Raymond Johnson.

Walter Brooke  
Tybalt, Cornel Wilde  
Page to Tybalt, Ben Webster  
Benvolio, Wesley Addy  
Page to Benvolio, Ralph Grayson  
A Third Woman, Patricia Knight  
A Fourth Woman, Mary Kane  
A Child, Morton L. Stevens  
A Cook, Virginia Burchfield  
First Peace Officer, Charles Prescott  
Second Peace Officer, Howard T. Stark  
Capulet, Halliwell Hobbes  
Lady Capulet, Katharine Warren  
Peter, Capulet's Servant, Raymond Johnson  
Montague, Ben Webster  
Lady Montague, Barbara Horder  
Four Soldiers, John Straub, Charles Martin, Tilsten Perry, H. Robert Edwards  
Mercutio, Edmond O'Brien  
Paris, Frank Downing  
Romeo, Laurence Olivier  
Nurse, May Whitty  
Juliet, Vivien Leigh  
Page to Mercutio, Ted Hulsh  
Page to Paris, Brant Gorman  
Rosaline, Hazel Bawn  
Old Capulet, Morton L. Stevens  
Friar Laurence, Alexander Knox  
Surgeon, Oliver Cliff  
Apothecary, Earl Grey  
Friar John, Morton L. Stevens  
Watchmen in the Churchyard, Ted Hulsh, Ralph Brooke

tion and sometimes with skill, but the plan of the production is against them. "Romeo and Juliet" isn't, I'm afraid, something to be tossed off between pictures.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, May 10, 1940

## Scarlett Capulet

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

BEING celebrated visitors from another medium, if not another planet, Miss Vivien Leigh and Laurence Olivier must expect to have their local sojourn in "Romeo and Juliet" taken as a spectacular personal appearance of Heathcliff and Scarlett O'Hara, rather than as an earnest impersonation of the star-crossed lovers in the Shakespearean tragedy. Since they are singers and intelligent players, with lofty ambitions about acting, this is no doubt an injustice to them, but it is one which is inherent in the great popular appeal of the motion pictures. And I would advise them to look upon the phenomenon with philosophical unconcern, because as two illustrious members of the Hollywood hierarchy they are likely to prove a considerable metropolitan success through their notable personal charm and good looks. Those of us, on the other hand, who must judge them as actors in one of the greatest of plays will have to be something less than gracious to them. Despite the excellence of their motives, their "Romeo and Juliet" is a most undistinguished production.

The moment Mr. Olivier decided to produce "Romeo and Juliet" he should have called in Miss Margaret Webster to direct it. Instead, with more enthusiasm than wisdom, he decided to do the directing himself, in addition to designing the settings and writing some of the rather noisy incidental music. The combination of tasks was too great for him, with the natural result that both the presentation and his performance suffer. The result is an ardent but youthful production, filled with passion and

high spirits, was an excellent one, but what has happened is that the manner of staging seems sprawling, ungainly and commonplace. There is little feeling for the lyric beauty of the lines, and it seems that more acuity than dramatic power has gone into the playing. Mr. Olivier darts about boldly and manfully and he is always a romantic and picturesque figure, but his portrayal is singularly lacking in emotion and eloquence. Even when he writhes in agony on the floor of Friar Laurence's cell, there seems to be little depth of feeling in his tragedy.

Miss Leigh, who must certainly be one of the most attractive women in the world, is considerably more successful than Mr. Olivier, despite the fact that he is a more experienced Shakespearean player. For one thing, she is the only Juliet of our time who has looked the part. She is youthful and

beautiful and softly feminine, and she can play such a light scene as the one after the nurse's return from the Friar's cell with a delightful display of childlike guile and ingenuousness. Unfortunately, she is unable to manage the more dramatic scenes with anything of the force and the dramatic resourcefulness that they demand. It is one of the sad things about the theater that by the time she has learned the complexities of her business to a degree that will enable her to play Juliet with proper emotional skill she will probably have ceased to look the part so ideally. Even now, despite the limits of her talent, she makes Juliet so lovely and winning a young girl and so pathetic a victim of tragedy that she is assuredly one of the brighter spots in the production.

The most unfortunate thing in the current "Romeo and Juliet" is Edmond O'Brien's Mercutio. Mr. O'Brien was quite a good Prince Hal with Maurice Evans in "King Henry IV," Part I, last season, but as one of dashing antic, tragic Mercutio, one of the most winning figures in all of Shakespeare, he is sadly ineffective. Playing with a combination of stolidity and fraudulent high spirits, he manages to achieve none of the qualities of a fascinating role, and he handles the famous Queen Mab speech in a manner that makes it seem completely fatuous. Only in the death scene is he at all successful. His lack of success in the role is all the more noticeable because there is a really fine Shakespearean actor in the cast in the person of Wesley Addy, who, I think, would have made an ideal Mercutio. As it is, Mr. Addy does wonders in bringing the infinitesimal role of Benvolio to life. That fine actress, Dame May Whitty, has some of the bawdiness of the nurse, but Halliwell Hobbes is a satisfactory Capulet, and Alexander Knox must receive the good old word "adequate" as the friar. The new "Romeo and Juliet" is a disappointment.



# "Romeo and Juliet"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, May 10, 1940

## "Romeo and Juliet" With Miss Leigh and Mr. Olivier

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IN A manner William Shakespeare did not anticipate, Romeo and Juliet were lovers star-cross'd and misadventur'd in Laurence Olivier's and Vivien Leigh's hands last evening. Although the mask of night was not on Juliet's face, it was on almost everything else at the 51st Street. It had settled like a heavy fog on nearly all the beauties of a play which, however irritating it may prove in the silliness of its avoidable catastrophes or infantile as it may be as a groping after true tragedy, boasts its lyric wonders and its acting challenges that for centuries and with reason have persuaded audiences to be forgetful of its faults.

Potentially Mr. Olivier might scale the difficult garden wall all Romeo, especially all modern Romeos, have to climb. Potentially, too, Miss Leigh might prove a Juliet worthy of admiration in and out of her balcony. Miss Leigh is a pretty woman, even if her features fail to project in a backstage Verona the beauty an enlarging camera gave them at Tara. She has a body, slim as it is graceful, which in a silent movie could meet the age requirements in this case of a cruelly specific text. Mr. Olivier is a handsome fellow, whenever he stands still long enough for one to catch a fleeting glimpse of his full face. He is, moreover, an actor who in England has not only enjoyed considerable experience in playing Shakespeare but who has won his plentiful devotees.

### Alas, Poor Romeo

The two of them, as I suggest, might make an acceptable Romeo and Juliet if only an excellent director were present to see them and the play from out front, and, above all, to listen with loving ears to what Shakespeare has written. Mr. Olivier, however, has elected to stage the tragedy in addition to presenting it and playing Romeo. And, I am forced to gather from the distressing evidence turned in all-too-plentifully last night, Mr. Olivier is not the ideal director for Mr. Olivier, Miss Leigh, or William Shakespeare.

Under his supervision, "Romeo and Juliet," so hot in its impulses, so youthful in its spirit, so tumultuous in its fatuous action, becomes a dead march from the rise of the first curtain. Not its last scene alone, but all of it is laid in a tomb. Satisfactory as are many of Motley's Fra Angelico settings as they spin around on a revolving stage, the fire of the narrative is extinguished at every pictorial moment by the dampening fussiness, the tedium, the downright irrelevance of all the Hollywood business Mr. Olivier has painstakingly introduced. In every sense of the word he has gone in for dumb-shoy, forgetting that what gives wings to the love-story he is staging is not its camera possibilities but its verse.

So unaware of the melodic values of Shakespeare's poetry does Mr. Olivier seem to be that, in addition to gulping down most of his lines as if they were so many bad oysters, he overloads the backstage with unseen musicians and choristers at many significant moments to create the music he and Miss Leigh fail to find in the music of the lines they are speaking. The result is less like carrying coals to Newcastle than totting violins to Stradivarius.

Mr. Olivier is all over the place as Romeo. His armorous Montague is part Fairbanks, Robin Hood, part Jitterbug, part Frankenstein, and all of them well shaken by more

scenery—clinging, crouching, hand-waving, and posturing than has been seen hereabouts in many comparatively tranquil theatrical years. If in the farewell scene and some of his later episodes, Mr. Olivier begins to show what his Romeo might be with some kind of direction, he does unfortunately seem to spend the rest of the evening dodging his own shadow and Shakespeare's verse.

### Alas, Poor Juliet

Pretty as she is, lovely as is her pillage body, Miss Leigh appears to be no less tone-deaf than Mr. Olivier in the presence of Mary Arden's boy. She is all motion and picture and no real sound. Although her voice is pleasant enough, especially in its less flat moments of emphasis, she never responds to the cadences of the verse she utters. Even her moonlit lines in the balcony scene emerge from her throat as prose—arid, muted, pedestrian.

If a director could work wonders with Mr. Olivier, one suspects he could work more wonders with Miss Leigh. Her Juliet may be young and still lack the warming spirit of youth. It may bump about on one of the O'Hara's post-war nag when it is meant to soar on Pegasus. It may lack humor, tenderness, pointing, variety, and the distinguishing qualities of true lyricism by means of which, for example, Miss Cornell embodied all tremulous young love. Still, it is more satisfactory than Mr. Olivier's Romeo. And somehow one is ready to believe that, with a director to teach her the ABC's of blank verse and to set over each line with her, Miss Leigh would make a satisfactory Juliet.

Of the rest of the cast, the less that is said the better, especially in the case of Halliwell Hobbes' preposterously jocund Capulet, Dame Mary Whitty, of whom much was expected, misses every comic value and all the rich qualities of the Nurse. Edmond O'Brien is the worst of all imaginable Mercutio. Only the Peter of Raymond Johnson, the Benvolio of Wesley Addy, and Alexander Knox as Laurence, that flat-footed friar, that Neville Chamberlain of Western Union boys, are passable. The pity is that Mr. Addy, the company's only Shakespeare actor whose skill is known to the New York stage, should have been given so little to do.

One wonders how the Prologue, in the face of such a slow-moving production, ever dares to speak of "the two hours' traffic of our stage." For the proceedings, more dismal than exciting, last much longer than that and seem twice as endless as "Gone With the Wind."

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, May 10, 1940

## "Romeo and Juliet," Olivier-Leigh Version Draws 51st St. Crowd

"Romeo and Juliet," tragedy by William Shakespeare. Produced by Laurence Olivier at the 51st St. Theatre, New York, May 9, 1940.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

CREDIT Laurence Olivier with courage, and credit Vivien Leigh with as effectively pictorial a Juliet as has faced footlights and cameras in a double decade. Credit their production of "Romeo and Juliet," which reached Broadway at the 51st Street Theatre last night, with a novel compactness in physical scenes, and their company with competent support.

But there the credits rest. These good-looking and earnest young actors are victims of their own success. Their own screen success primarily.

Too much has been promised in their name. Too much was expected of them.

Mr. Olivier's Shakespearean training has been extended and thorough. He reads with considerable authority and in good voice.

But he plays such an adolescent as Romeo, undoubtedly was, and any leviathan lad of 18 is a pretty stiff dose for an evening's worship.

### The Lady Is Young

Miss Leigh's adventures with the classics

have been more limited, and her struggle to overcome her inexperience is more apparent. Therefore all that she has to give is such an adolescent as Shakespeare drew, and again, while the picture is perfect, the characterization is immature and shallow.

Don't ask me why Mr. Olivier and Miss Leigh, being so much in character as Shake-

speare's ill-starred lovers, are still disappointing. The fault, I'll say, is largely with the theatre and its traditions.

Our Juliets have been mature and of a romantic past. Our Romeos, though always a little sappy, have been mostly idealized heroes of romance. We have a suppliant character with personality and, for our own salvation, shut our eyes and our reason to the facts of the case and the lines of the text.

When we are faced, therefore, with a pair whose stage love is as naive as their frequently confessed off-stage love for each other, disappointment follows.

### Interesting Scenes

The Olivier production of the classic love story is interesting. It has been cut into 21 scenes which are changed smartly and many of which are well furnished and lighted. It uses a revolving stage as well as a revolving Romeo.

The Verona street on which the Capulet and Montague houses face, the interior of the Capulet home, the orchard and balcony are splendidly realized.

We have three views of the balcony and the bedroom, which are both practical and of support to the plot. In the potion scene Juliet struggles with the vapors and swallows the poison while she still is in her street dress, close upon her return from the apothecary's, which is a new touch.

Friar Laurence's cell has character and they tell me the tomb scene is the most interesting of all. I could not wait for that.

Outstanding in the individual performances of the support are the Benvolio of Wesley Addy, the Nurse of Dame Mary Whitty, which is soundly traditional, the Capulet of Halliwell Hobbes, which is amusingly expanded; the Friar Laurence of Alexander Knox, which has a fine authority.

There was a huge crowd present last night, and as many more celebrity hunters on the street and in the lobby.

# "The Strangler Fig"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, May 7, 1940

## "The Strangler Fig," a Mystery Drama, Is Offered at the Lyceum Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

ALL the homicides are according to Hoyle in "The Strangler Fig," which opened at the Lyceum last evening. Members of the cast are hanged to doors and garrotes as they take their ease, motives are scattered lavishly and the semi-professional detective solves all, relying on intuition and a revolver from which he has removed the cartridges. Love flowers amid carnage, and one of the least suspicious of the characters is the most criminal of the lot.

These are the elements of mystery melodrama and they are the elements supplied by John Stephen Strange, a veteran practitioner and author of the novel on which the play is based. Miss Edith Meiser, the adapter, has, however, strewn it all with verbiage, writing dialogue so stiff and humor so ponderous that Mr. Strange's original invention staggers under the weight. Whenever excitement makes its appearance Miss Meiser knocks it cold with a wisecrack to the jaw. And what the dialogue does not do to numb, some of the acting does.

This is unfortunate, since the basic story is intricate and fairly neat, although nig-

gardly as to clews. Friends, relatives and wives of the late Mr. Huntington gather on an island off the Florida coast to investigate his taking off. A lawyer-detective directs them, a skeleton tumbles from the coils of a monstrous fig vine, a blackmailer is strangled by a white-clad figure, and a ruthless politician is caught and done in during a moment of relaxation. The detective solves it all, with one arm around a pretty girl, and you will

### "THE STRANGLER FIG"

A mystery melodrama in a prologue and three acts, adapted by Edith Meiser from a book by John Stephen Strange; directed by Frank Coletti; setting by Frederick Fox; presented at the Lyceum Theater on May 6, 1940, by William Herz. The cast:

|                         |                 |
|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Maman Chloe .....       | Musa Williams   |
| Mrs. Stella Drew .....  | Paula MacLean   |
| Jacob Grass .....       | Royal Beal      |
| John Stuart .....       | James Todd      |
| Daniel Lane .....       | William Roselle |
| Lydia Vaughn .....      | Edith Meiser    |
| Solomon Jura .....      | John Lorens     |
| Madeleine Huntington .. | Madeleine Chase |
| Adele Huntington .....  | Margaret Curtis |
| Franklin .....          | Doolay Wilson   |
| Bolivar Brown .....     | Eddie Nugent    |

hardly guess the murderer until the end. You will guess before that that Miss Meiser has tried much too hard to be funny in her dialogue, and with depressingly little success. It is a stiffly, awkwardly written play and, like most stiffly written plays, it is stiffly acted. Few of those in the cast manage to sound as if they believe what they are saying and several go off at odd tangents. Miss Madeleine Chase has special difficulties, and at one point announces her intention to mix up a little salad in tones so blood-curdling that one woman in the balcony screamed in terror. Eddie Nugent, Margaret Curtis and Doolay Wilson are among those who find the going easier. It's pretty tough at best, however.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, May 7, 1940

## Island Doom

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

FOR the characters in a mystery melodrama I have only the keenest admiration. Under the most trying circumstances they invariably display an unfettered calmness that should be an inspiration to all of us. Although murders, weird outcries, ominous shadows and hints of doom are all about them, they go quietly about their business, playing cards, making bad jokes, going in for a bit of flirtation and sitting in exposed corners like the fearless people that they obviously are. It is true that one of the women is likely to shout in a particularly sinister moment, but you may be sure that it won't be long before she has recovered her composure and is quietly making love somewhere to an equally unfrightened juvenile.

That is how it is with the bold people in "The Strangler Fig." Throughout the three acts and a prologue of Miss Edith Meiser's new mystery play, they are subjected to horrors of various kinds. They realize that they have been invited to the island off the coast of Florida because they are suspected of knowing something of the mysterious disappearance of Stephen Huntington. Once on the island they encounter, among other terrors,

three strangled men in reasonably hasty succession, as well as a hurricane, strange talk of a vine that kills, a lot of voodoo speeches from a particularly ominous Haitian called Maman Chloe and more than the usual quota of bad jests—and what do you suppose they are likely to be doing when the curtain rises on the next act? Either playing cards or going off quietly for the salad?

Until almost the end of the third act of Miss Meiser's play I thought I had followed

the plot without too much difficulty. Then, just after the killer had been exposed, the playwright kindly set down several long explanatory speeches, and from then on everything went blank to me. I know that there was a man from Devil's Island somewhere in the story and that Maman Chloe unfortunately wasn't among those strangled and that a curious character not to be found on the program added to the bewilderment of the evening, but, after that explanation, I don't feel too sure about any of it. All that I can tell you is that a play of similar badness on any other subject would have been utterly boring, but that, since it dealt with mysterious killers stalking about, "The Strangler Fig" kept us all in our seats.

After the killer had been exposed and the various dead bodies carted away, I am sure that the survivors of the amiable week end off the coast of Florida calmly went back to their bad jokes, their interrupted supper and their lovemaking. In the old days of such veteran mystery melodramas as "The Bat," I used to be annoyed by the comic servants who were always terribly frightened by what was going on. Now I think I would welcome even one of them. It is all very bold and courageous of the boys and girls in things like "The Strangler Fig"—and, heaven knows, there have been many of them—to remain so calm, but it does seem that it might be a good idea if they looked just a tiny little bit scared occasionally. Otherwise they perform impeccably.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, May 7, 1940

## "The Strangler Fig" New Mystery at the Lyceum

By WILELLA WALDORF

IT is not considered cricket for reviewers to outline the plot of a mystery play, and the sponsors of "The Strangler Fig," revealed last night at the Lyceum, need have no fear that this department will break the rule. So much of it is still a mystery that we couldn't if we wanted to.

A Strangler Fig, it appears is a plant that goes about strangling people. It doesn't like, or so the natives of World's End, an island off the Coast of Florida, believe in their quaint Haitian way. Sound of drums in the distance. Enter Maman Chloe, a cook who never does any cooking but seems to be under the impression that she is playing a combination of Lady Macbeth and a Voodoo witch-woman.

Seven years ago Stephen Huntington disap-

peared. Did the Fig get him? Looks mighty like it. Madeleine Huntington's house-party

includes everybody from a dastardly Republican Senator (Hassas) to Bolivar Brown, a master-mind in spectacles, and at least two persons are strangled on the premises, and not by a plant, but by a bathrobe cord.

In order to show off the first corpse, the stage is darkened on cue and a sickly green spot is thrown on the body hanging from a door. . . . The next murder is accomplished right on the stage, but through a curtain, while Mrs. Drew is playing solitaire. She has just turned up the ace of spades. . . .

"Good God, what a mess!" ejaculates Daniel Lane of the Shipping Board, expressing the feelings of quite a few of the audience.

Edith Meiser, who summoned the strength to make this play out of a novel by John Stephen Strange, likewise acts what she herself terms the comic relief and is bravely supported by a company of actors who must have been confused as we were, if not more so. We were thinking along toward the end that they'd introduced just about everything but Devil's Island, when in it came.

We don't expect much of mystery melodrama these days, but this one seems too dull and too complicated even for the cut-rate trade.

# "The Strangler Fig"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, May 7, 1940

## "The Strangler Fig" Story of Murder and Voodooism in Haiti

"The Strangler Fig," mystery drama adapted by Edith Meiser from a story by John Stephen Strange. Produced by William Herz at the Lyceum Theatre, New York, May 6, 1940.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

MURDER is certainly tossed about casual and careless like in this new piece at the Lyceum called "The Strangler Fig." Somebody is getting rubbed out, as the saying goes, every quarter hour and no one seems to care a fig. Least of all the audience.

Edith Meiser, who made the adaptation from a story by John Stephen Strange, is a tall, dark actress of experience who has written hundreds of dramatic scripts for radio.

That could explain a lot. It is easy to grow careless on the air. The radio drama is so quickly beyond recall no one has time to protest, nor much interest in protesting, even if there were time.

Miss Meiser makes precious little, if any, effort to tie even a mystery play logic in with her story. Nor to clarify the liberties she takes with the probabilities.

### Jungles and Bungles

A group of strange persons have been assembled on a jungle island off the Florida coast. Several are eager to solve the mystery of a man's disappearance on that same island seven years before.

Several others are as eager to halt the investigation. As soon as one gets close to a clue the long arm of the strangler reaches out and there is another corpse dangling from a hook or a tough politician slumped in his chair.

But life must go on. There is drinking, and an occasional labored effort at wisecracking, a shriek, a shudder, a voodoo mumber or a

frankish bit of weather to cover a scene.

In the end there is a confession from the most unlikely of the suspects. Even the confession is filled with mystery.

### For the Bargain Basement

It may be that William Herz, the producer, plans to throw "The Strangler Fig" on the bargain table. He started it last night at a \$2.75 top for the first night. If he cuts that to \$1.10 he will be playing reasonably fair with such audiences as may be attracted.

In stilted and unreasonable drama the acting must also be stilted and unreasonable. There is nothing human in these characters for the actors to fasten to.

Eddie Nugent, playing a journalistic Sherlock, manages to keep fairly sane. Miss Meiser is mildly interesting as a sharp-tongued spinster. They are all pretty routine, including the off-stage noises. Competent direction might have helped.

Reprinted from  
NEW YORK TIMES  
May 7, 1940

## Murder, Unlimited

THE demons were in almost complete command of World's End, one of those cays off the coast of Florida. It was they who sent a hurricane along to form a prologue and it was they who distributed a murder or suicide through each of three acts. The demons, or else Edith Meiser, who fashioned the Lyceum's little trinket from a book by John Stephen Strange, Miss Meiser did not win, nor did voodooism, nor did crime pay, nor was the cause of melodrama advanced one whit along Forty-fifth Street, east of Broadway. "The Strangler Fig" is not that sort of play.

We have, set down at World's End, all the people who were present the night seven years before when Stephen Huntington disappeared. We have, as an added starter, Bolivar Brown, the lawyer and sleuth, who was invited through the hurricane to solve the disappearance. We have as had a set of house guests as you will find anywhere near Florida: crooks in high places (the United States Senate, God save the mark!), ladies of restless virtue, blackmailers. Some of them do not live until the end of the third act, and may be, who can say, they got a break and perhaps a game of cards backstage. Drums beat, lights go out, doors open and bang and eventually Mr. Brown gives us the solution. The strangler fig, in the little role, is a vine which stays off-stage.

The case is somewhat beset by their encounters with a few of the Spring's less sprightly lines. Eddie Nugent is the lawyer-detective who attacks World's End's great mystery, and he is a detective Commissioner Valentine would send immediately to far Staten Island. Royal Beal is there as the United States Senator, Edith Meiser is there as the lady who once had loved the late Mr. Huntington, Musa Williams is there to deliver incantations against the further twinges of the strangler fig itself. All of them tried. L. N.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, May 7, 1940

## Strangler Fig, Murder Yarn, Opens at Lyceum Theater

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THE class in dramatic criminology will now discuss the strange case of The Strangler Fig, a play by Edith Meiser, which was presented last night at the Lyceum Theater by William Herz. We will pose a series of questions and give the proper answers.

Q. A gentleman at a house party on a Florida island is strangled and left dangling on a hook in his bedroom door, to be discovered by the butler just before luncheon is announced. What do the remaining members of the house party do? A. They go in to luncheon and reserve their discussion of the matter until they have finished their mid-afternoon bridge game.

Q. What does the apologetic hostess say about the bridge game, in these distressing circumstances? A. She says: "I'm afraid the bridge wasn't a very great success."

Q. When a second gentleman is strangled, after dinner, in the living room, what does the hostess do? A. She says to the colored butler, "Franklin, bring us all some champagne."

Q. When a murder is committed on March 22, 1933, what happens on the night of March 22, 1940? A. Everybody who was present at the original house party, with the possible exception of the murdered man, returns to the scene of the crime.

Q. In the third act, with two stranglings,

one attempted murder and general threats to every member of the party having provided an air, shall we say, of some uneasiness, what does the able young detective in the horn-rimmed glasses say to the butler? A. He says: "Franklin, are things beginning to get you?"

If you doubt this technique, I have only to refer you to Miss Meiser herself, who not only adapted The Strangler Fig from John Stephen Strange's book (which I shall never find time to read), but who plays one of the leading roles. Furthermore, you have it on the word of the Lyceum Theater program notes that Miss Meiser has written 5,000,000 words for the radio, a statement which any-

body who has ever listened to radio drama will not be inclined to doubt.

Since it would be impossible to tell the complicated story of The Strangler Fig without rewriting practically all of Mr. Strange's book, I will simply report that A kills B when she discovers that B knows she killed C and then kills D because D knows she killed B, and that this thing might have gone on practically indefinitely if the young man with the horn-rimmed glasses hadn't confronted her with the evidence and then permitted her the luxury of an off-stage suicide.

The plot, such as it is, is obscured by hurricanes, voodoo spirits and a vine which is reputed to reach out with its tendrils and grasp the passerby in a lethal embrace.

It is unnecessary, I am sure, to embarrass any members of the cast by extended reference to their respective parts in this impossible melodrama.

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New York Times  
New York Daily News  
New York Herald Tribune  
New York World-Telegram

Place this week's reviews with preceding weekly reviews so as to have always an up to date file of the New York Stage.



# "Out From Under"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, May 6, 1940

## 'Out From Under,' a Small Spring Farce, Opens at the Biltmore

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

**B**ROCK PEMBERTON, having wound up a little clock-work farce called "Out From Under," set it going Saturday evening at the Biltmore. It buzzed around in circles for two acts, after the manner of such toy machines, and then flew apart in a small explosion of wheels and springs and detached bits of plot. There is nothing much in this event to hold the attention.

The author of "Out From Under," John Walter Kelly, has imagined a small-town editor in Indiana who wrote a book. It was a book about a man who left all conventional things for the charms of the South Seas, and felt a lot better for it. The

editor kept this literary escapade under his hat, never letting his silly wife or his staid acquaintances dream that he had published such heresy under another name. The secret begins to leak early in Mr. Kelly's play, and the complications include a blond publisher's representative with no shoulder straps, and a city slicker and a couple of cute young things who want to get married but can't until the boy gets a job running a

newspaper in South America. Well, that's what Mr. Kelly says. Probably the complications, at least up to the last-act collapse, are as ingenious as the complications in good farces and not much more implausible. Mr. Kelly has worked himself to a frazzle in his effort to think of funny lines and has even gone so far as to

### 'OUT FROM UNDER'

A comedy in three acts by John Walter Kelly; staged by Antoinette Perry; setting by John Root; presented at the Biltmore Theater on May 4, 1940, by Brock Pemberton. The cast:  
Bessie Gedge.....Margaret Douglass  
Amy.....Viola Dean  
Helen Parker.....Ruth Weston  
Marian Parker.....Tina Thayer  
Joe Parker.....John Alexander  
The Rev. Dr. Chester.....G. Albert Smith  
Humphrey Williams.....Philip Ober  
Lawrence Thomas.....James Corner  
Claire James.....Vivian Vance  
Paul Manning.....John, Robb

think of a few. Miss Antoinette Perry's direction keeps everybody hurrying, and there does not seem to be any single good reason why the results should be tedious instead of amusing. They are tedious instead of amusing, however—tedious and mechanical and a waste of time on the part of the usually sagacious Mr. Pemberton.

John Alexander makes the central role as funny as anybody could, putting not only his heart but his shoulders and his mobile features into the work. Miss Vivian Vance is both ominous and assured as the blond menace and Miss Viola Dean is comical as a pert maid who is anything but blond. Miss Ruth Weston and the rest also try hard, but the results are always trivial. "Out From Under" is just one of the four-paragraph plays which come up in the spring.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, May 6, 1940

## Brock Pemberton Stages "Out From Under"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

**A**S EVERYONE must know who has seen him in such plays as "Kiss the Boys Goodbye," "Swing Your Lady," or "Morning's At Seven," John Alexander is a stout fellow who can wrestle amusingly with farce and throw an audience for a laughing fall. Certainly Margaret Douglass is no slouch when it comes to comedy. Her man-crazy countess in "The Women" and her scatter-brained Louisville in "Russet Mantle" proved her skill beyond dispute. Ruth Weston has also done her valiant messenger girl's duty delivering wisecracks in a score of plays, most of them happily forgotten. And Vivian Vance, G. Albert Smith, and Philip Ober—they are all of them agreeable performers when given half the chance.

As for Brock Pemberton, who has brought these actors together in something produced at the Biltmore Saturday night under the all-too accurate title of "Out From Under,"

why Brother Pemberton, between his admirable discussions of the art of the theatre, has often produced with Antoinette Perry farce-comedies which have tickled the nation's fancy. "Strictly Dishonorable," "Per-

sonal Appearance," and "Kiss the Boys Goodbye" are sufficient reminders of the skill of the team of Perry and Pemberton when luck has been with them.

### Effortful Foolishness

I mention luck because most assuredly it was not with Mr. Pemberton and Miss Perry when they decided to stage John Walter Kelly's "Out From Under." Mr. Kelly's farce-comedy is a sour bit of foolishness which deals laboriously with the way in which a small-town conformist, who has secretly written a daring best-seller that has made its unseen author the idol of his silly wife, suddenly goes "bustle-rustler" with a vengeance.

To say that Mr. Kelly's supposedly gay creation is all work and no play is perhaps to indicate how hard its actors are forced to slay. But it is not to give any adequate indication of how cruelly the audience is forced to work to find pleasure in their antics. Miss Douglass offers some quiet-voiced moments of rest. John Alexander is funny once in a long, long while. Miss Weston is tiresome throughout. And Mr. Root's setting is as over-elaborate as the farce for which it is designed is unamusing. The one bright spot in an evening of almost total eclipse is a Viola Dean, a pretty septia maiden, who as a hard-boiled, gin-loving domestic shows a genuine flair for comedy and must be thanked for the petty larceny of stealing such a show.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, May 6, 1940

## Minor Episode

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

**T**HE amazing thing about Saturday night's premiere is the discovery that such plays as "Out From Under" are still being concocted. It isn't that I am under the sudden mad delusion that no bad plays are in the process of manufacture these days. I merely thought that they were of a different type of badness—that they at least didn't go in for the sort of complicated farcical plot maneuverings and antic darting about of the characters that obscure whatever minor virtues the narrative of John Walter Kelly might otherwise have offered. Although a number of pleasant performers work themselves into frenzies of activity to make it bearable, this latest offering from the studio of Mr. Brock Pemberton seems a relic from the theater's less exhilarating past.

The central character of "Out From Under" is a stodgy small-town newspaper editor whose foolish wife is always contrasting his

duillness with the romantic fascination of the unknown author of a book about adventures in Tahiti. If you are half the playgoer that I think you are, it won't take many scenes of the wife's sentimental fantasies and the

editor's manly folkiness to let you in on the big discovery that the husband is the secret writer of the book the lady admires so much. Apparently Mr. Kelly was a bit doubtful of his ability to make a play of so limited a plot, so he adds a lot of incidental tales about ingenuities, juveniles, madonic spinsters, alcoholic maids, seductive city women, puritanical ministers and interloping braggarts. The result is as neat a combination of boredom and confusion as you could well avoid.

It is an agreeable, as well as strenuous, cast that Mr. Pemberton has assembled for this doubtful venture of his. He has engaged John Alexander to be the editor, Miss Ruth Weston as the wife, Miss Margaret Douglass as the spinster, Miss Viola Dean as the lively Negro maid, Miss Tina Thayer, and James Corner as ingenu and juvenile. Philip Ober as the pompous braggart, Miss Vivian Vance as the seductive visitor and G. Albert Smith as the minister, and all of them play engagingly. The dusky Miss Dean is the only one who seems to have a happy time with the evening's chores, but she, too, is doomed by her material. "Out From Under" is theater-going in one of its less enticing aspects.

# "Out From Under"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, May 6, 1940

## 'Out From Under,' a New Farce, Tells of Country Editor's Urge

"Out from Under," comedy by John Walter Kelly. Produced by Brock Pemberton at the Biltmore Theatre, New York, May 4, 1940.

By BURNS MANTLE

THE situation from which the story of "Out from Under" stems is that of a tired country editor who writes a best seller as a means of escaping from the dullness of a newspaper man's life in a small town.

It is not, as you probably know, a new situation. Nor one ever very successfully employed on the stage. Part of the trouble with it in this instance is that any man smart enough to write a best seller is not likely to be dumb enough to be funny.

And a comedian dumb enough to be funny, according to farce formula, is too dumb to write a best seller.

### Comedian's Luck

In the case of John Alexander he loses out on both counts. He is made to appear in "Out From Under" as a little too dumb to edit

anything more exciting than a mail order catalogue.

But not dumb enough to be a good comedian.

It is unlike Brock Pemberton, who pro-

duced "Out From Under" at the Biltmore Saturday night, and Antoinette Perry, who staged it to select a farce dependent upon its lines rather than its characters and situations without realizing that it hasn't enough good lines to carry it.

But that is what has happened here. So I suspect there is a story of sorts back of the production. Perhaps somebody's rich aunt is paying for the experience of seeing "Out From Under" on the stage.

The Alexander editor reveals himself freely in his novel. His passions apparently include a blonde and his adventures a fling that excite his editors.

### Players Struggle

They send a bold and handsome lady from their "author relations" department to interview him with the idea of inducing him to give up editing and go in for lecturing to women's clubs.

The beleaguered editor tries to keep both the blonde's connections and the knowledge of his writing success from his wife. Which is good fun for a scene but not for an evening.

The players include Ruth Weston, again put to it trying to be excited about nothing, and Margaret Douglass, who has the best lines as a caustic sister but is never given a fair chance to speak them.

The minute she opens her mouth either the cast or the action smothers her. Vivian Vance is the visiting menace and very nice. There is a chance Mr. Pemberton intends to follow the producers of "When We Are Married" and "Separate Rooms" in tossing "Out From Under" on the bargain counter.

These comedies caused something less than first-night excitement when they were produced, but had no difficulty continuing after the cost of them had been lowered to the movie standard.

There apparently is a public, probably trained in cinema comedy, that will buy this type of farce at a price.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, May 6, 1940

## Out From Under Is Comedy of a Small Town Editor

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

SOME extremely capable actors and an idea that had some excellent farcical possibilities went grievously astray Saturday night in a comedy called "Out from Under," by John Walter Kelly, which opened at the Biltmore Theatre.

Pray consider the following situation: A small town editor named Joe Parker is tired of a dull matrimonial existence and sick of the petty conventionality of his stodgy community. Lacking the courage to escape from it, he obtains a vicarious release by writing a novel in which his hero does all the things he would like to do, such as deserting his wife, abandoning civilization and throwing himself into the willing arms of a South Seas harem.

The novel is written under a pseudonym and becomes a best seller. All the women in the country buy it. Mrs. Parker not only buys it, but is so impressed with its philosophy that she applies it to her own case and wants to run away with another man. And Parker, horrified by his own literary daring, is afraid to reveal that he is the author of the devastating work.

With this as the basis for his play one would think that Mr. Kelly might have given us an uproarious evening. Unfortunately he has stirred a lot of other ingredients into his plot, thinning it out with dashes of stale humor and synthetic wit until it becomes pale and tasteless.

The drunken housemaid who blackmails her spineless boss, the blond bombshell who descends from New York to harrm him out of his peaceful existence, the big blowhard from the city who fancies himself as a lady-killer, the sappy clergyman and the acidulous and wise-cracking spinster sister who lives with Joe and his wife—all these characters Mr. Kelly seems to have picked up, badly shop-worn, at some literary rummage sale.

Not being content to rest upon the humor that actually underlies his original thought, Mr. Kelly embellishes it with the type of

comedy that calls for slapping women's derrieres, gazing lecherously at their décolletage, leering at their legs and similar deportment that was once highly favored by patrons of the old Columbia wheel.

John Alexander, a hard-working and competent actor if there ever was one, struggles manfully but to little avail with the overdrawn and unbelievable character of the editor, and stately Ruth Weston gives her best to the part of the sappy wife. Vivian Vance, the blonde armful who made trouble for the heroine in Skyhawk, is the home-wrecker in this one and works enthusiastically at it. Philip Ober seems a little embarrassed at the lines he is given and cannot be blamed for it. Margaret Douglass makes the stock character of the smart spinster strangely real, and little Tina Thayer contributes youthful charm to the otherwise sad picture.

I am somewhat at a loss to find a reason for Mr. Brock Pemberton's production of this nonsense, and the wasting not only of his efforts, but the directing talent of Miss Antoinette Perry and the excellent design of John Root, all of which are worthy of better material.

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NEW YORK TIMES

May 6, 1940

## Saturday Night Out

By BROOKS ATKINSON

NO ONE can say now that New York is not a tick town. Any place that yields a frolic like "Out From Under" still has hayseed in its hair. John Walter Kelly wrote it, and it was acted at the Biltmore on Saturday evening, when all the folks dress up, drive to town and have themselves a fast time. It has something to do with a respectable burgher who has secretly written a scandalous book that becomes a best seller. While he is trying to preserve his anonymity Mr. Kelly and the actors scribble witticisms, smug crockery, drink gin, look lewd and make deep's eyes at a low-cut evening gown.

It is one of the emptiest comedies of modern times, and the performance, at high speed and in raised voices, is one of the holiest. By acting dryly and lightly, Margaret Douglass is the only principal player to come out of it with reputation intact. The Ladies' Auxiliary used to put on better shows at the Lower Corners, with some of their husbands stumbling red-faced through the comedy roles. Then home in the open democratic with the lassied laprobe keeping out the damp night air.

# "Grey Farm"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, May 4, 1940

## 'Grey Farm,' a Study in Murder, Opens at the Hudson Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

A MILK, or British, case of homicidal mania was gloomily diagnosed last evening at the Hudson Theater by the authors of "Grey Farm," Hector Bolitho and Terence Rattigan. Mr. Bolitho and Mr. Rattigan feel that an inclination to choke one's associates is closely related to the position of the thumbs. If they turn up you had better watch out, and so had your friends.

The thumbs of James Grantham, who lived and brooded at Grey Farm in Cambridgeshire, turned up like anything. His wife had died nineteen years before in giving birth to his son and this left Mr. Grantham shaken. Then his son fell in love

with a nice girl who was going to Cambridge, and this made Mr. Grantham shake more than ever. He had, you see, transferred the love he used to feel for his wife to his son and could not bear rivalry. If you don't see, Mr. Bolitho and Mr. Rattigan do.

Mr. Grantham shook and shook last evening and finally, toward the end of the third act, he murdered. He did not murder his son, oddly enough, although earlier he

knocked him about a bit. When Mr. Grantham got around to crime he picked on a chambermaid, who had just dropped in for an innocent bit of blackmail on a totally unrelated subject having to do with her love life. After the murder Mr. Grantham shook worse than ever and finally had to kill himself.

This is mighty psychological, probably, but

### 'GREY FARM'

A melodrama in three acts by Hector Bolitho and Terence Rattigan; staged by Berthold Viertel; designed by Raymond Savoy; presented at the Hudson Theater on May 3, 1940, by Irving Cooper.

Mrs. Iron.....Evelyn Varden  
Stephen Grantham.....John Cromwell  
Judith Weaver.....Jane Sterling  
James Grantham.....Oscar Homolka  
Maya.....Maria Temple  
Lady Weaver.....Adrienne Morrison  
Ellen.....Vera Mellish

It isn't very interesting and takes a long time to reach a given murder. The dialogue is drab, even when Mr. Grantham is shaking, and I have grave doubts about the thumb and the man turning his thumbs up and staring at them doesn't scare me, particularly. I trust, the spectacle of a reviewer turning his thumbs down and staring at them won't scare Mr. Bolitho and Mr. Rattigan.

Oscar Homolka, a German actor making his debut here, is Mr. Grantham and he acts the role thoroughly, gibbering elaborately when the mood strikes him and wearing his hair low and tangled on his forehead. No doubt, however, homicidal maniacs behave very oddly. Miss Evelyn Varden is attractively reasonable as a devoted housekeeper and the others in the cast show devotion to the cause. It is not an inspiring cause.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, May 4, 1940

## Death With Father

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IT TAKES two and a half acts to get around to the murder in the new English melodrama called "Grey Farm," and then it isn't a very good one. Instead of strangling his son, as some of the grouches in the audience had hoped he would, the homicidal gentleman in the Hector-Bolitho-Terence Rattigan play merely kills one of the minor characters, a harmless maid, and we connoisseurs felt that he was falling down on his job. The killer is so glowering and menacing and ominous in appearance and he stalks about so balefully that you are bound to expect far more and better slaughter from him than he ever manages to provide. Perhaps it was because I never did quite forgive him for letting his son go at the end of the first act that I was so disappointed in his work.

"Grey Farm" marks the American debut of the German actor named Oscar Homolka, who has been seen here a number of times

on the screen. Mr. Homolka is a stout gentleman who looks rather like a Central European John L. Lewis, and he is a player of force and power. In his current vehicle, however, he is inclined to give way to the temptation to have an actor's field day as he

goes about the business of offering us a detailed study of a mad father driven to homicidal frenzy when he finds that his son is going to leave him. It is quite a convincing clinical analysis that he offers us, but, probably because he knew that the play needed something or other to enliven it, he is sometimes inclined to be just a trifle too thoroughgoing in those details. Perhaps it would be a good idea if we saw Mr. Homolka in something else before estimating him too carefully as an actor.

There is a minimum of activity and a maximum of dire hints of horrors to come in the new work. The horrors, however, rarely arrive, save occasionally as reflected in Mr. Homolka's performance. Anyway, it seems that old Mr. Grantham never had been the same since his wife died nineteen years before, but he manages to be fairly normal until he finds that his son is about to get married. Then madness comes upon him and, after he has contemplated his thumbs dubiously for most of the evening and has beaten them against a table upon occasion, he finally mistakes a servant girl for his son's fiancée and kills her. "Grey Farm" is interesting neither as melodrama nor as a pathological study of a homicidal maniac, and I hardly think it will be with us long. The laurels of "Ladies in Retirement" remain untouched.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, May 4, 1940

## Oscar Homolka in a New Melodrama, 'Grey Farm'

By JOHN MASON BROWN

THE most baffling critical problem raised by "Grey Farm" is that in it Oscar Homolka can consent to tottering around the stage for three acts with his thumbs up instead of down. Hector Bolitho and Terence Rattigan would have us know that any one whose most preaxial digit aspires to imitate the Trylon is a potential murderer.

Mr. Homolka figures prominently in such a potential capacity in "Grey Farm." He is not only an insane father but a father who is insanely jealous of his son's fiancée. In the shadow of his shaggy eyebrows, and with long locks of hair streaming down over his face like ribbons on a deserted Maypole, he does a hundred and one over-scrupulous tricks to indicate that something is about to happen at any moment. But as the minutes slip by into half-hours and as the half-hours stretch out into hours

without anything more happening that might disturb the peace of an unpopular mortician's parlor, it becomes increasingly difficult for pacifists out front at the Hudson not to

yearn for action of some kind, even if it should fail to make sense.

### Murder Won't Out

Except for Mr. Homolka, who is finally shot by some of Britain's more deliberate police, the only casualty the evening yields on the far side of the footlights is a servant girl who loses her life, though not her honor, in the Grantham's service.

It is impossible to imagine trash on a more wholesale and boring scale than "Grey Farm" dishes out by the slow wagon-load. Evelyn Varden, ever one of the most dependable and capable of our actresses, is on hand (though one now hesitates to use even such a cliché) wasting her fine talents trying to pump blood into a paper-doll housekeeper. John Cromwell, a personable young player with intelligence and a good voice, skis uphill against the odds of a terrific part as the son, Jane Sterling is pretty and eager as his fiancée. Adrienne Morrison appears as briefly as though at a station platform on an express stop as a scatter-brained English lady. And Mr. Homolka is all over the place, twirling his thumbs and overlooking no ominous continental tricks to make one look forward either to a little active strangulation or at least some passive interest. But the evening is more than a bore; it is a titan among bores; in fact, it is several titans, all of whom just happen to be dumb.



# "Grey Farm"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, May 4, 1940

## "Grey Farm" a Drama Of Father Love and The Strangler Urge

"Grey Farm," drama by Hector Bolitho and Terence Rattigan. Produced by Irving Cooper at the Hudson Theatre, New York, May 3, 1940.



By BURNS MANTLE

"GREY FARM," at the Hudson Theatre, is Hector Bolitho's and Terence Rattigan's story of a father who loved his only begotten son so possessively that he simply could not see him married to one of the prettiest ingenues on Broadway.

The son, played by John Cromwell, is 19 years old. His mother had died at his birth. For that reason his father first hated, then worshipped, then hated him something fierce.

Even though father pursued Mavis, the maid, in an effort to stem a growing obsession urging him to strangle someone—anyone—the reawakened passion did not save him.

In the end, having strangled Mavis, he

called the police, went up stairs and shot himself. Good thing, too.

### Hopeful Authors

This is a melodrama that the Messrs. Bolitho and Rattigan have written in the confident belief that it is not only a holding and effectively chilling melodramatic entertainment, but that it also is filled with a great acting opportunity for a great character actor.

At the Hudson last night it failed its creators on both counts. The story was obviously manufactured and without conviction, and the actor who played the father, Oscar Homolka, was handicapped, either by the direction of Berthold Viertel or his own grooved limitations.

Mr. Homolka is new to the American stage. He comes from Germany with a reputation as a screen actor of the Charles Laughton type.

In his first American part he was moody and given to staring vacantly at his hands, his feet, the floor, his son, his housekeeper, his prospective daughter-in-law, the scenery and the maids.

This is a technique employed by many character actors in like circumstances, but unless it is saved by a story sufficiently absorbing to distract the attention of an audience, it becomes not only obvious but a little silly.

Judgment, however, should be suspended in Mr. Homolka's case until he has a fairer chance.

Mr. Cromwell suggested an honest state of befuddlement. Jane Sterling was the pretty ingenue. Maria Temple wiggled her Mavis. Evelyn Varden gave a simple and sane performance as a housekeeper, and Adrienne Morrison, after thirteen years, looked in just long enough to say hello and good-by.

Irving Cooper, producer, has provided a handsome Raymond Sovey set.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, May 4, 1940

## Grey Farm Presents A Homicidal Madman

WHAT this town always can use is a fine horror show and can thank Gilbert Miller for letting us have one—that one being Ladies in Retirement—for Grey Farm which Irving Cooper presented at the Hudson last evening isn't. To blood-thirsty playgoers who have been fed such strong stuff as Ladies in Retirement, Grey Farm seems a weakly diluted potion which, if it moves you to the edge of your seat at all, nudges you there out to sheer impatience for something to happen.

Hector Bolitho and Terence Rattigan have contrived to scarify us with a psychological melodrama of a homicidal madman and there are Freudian undertones, not to speak of hints by the Drs. Kisch and Kraft-Ebing. But even a psychological melodrama ought to be more than merely psychological and the characters might be made to let you in on what's going on, instead of carrying the plot around in their heads—or by mumbling it to themselves.

### Homolka Mumbles

Oscar Homolka, well known to cinema audiences here, but who never appeared on the Broadway stage until last night, mumbles almost continuously in Grey Farm. His aberration is due to the imminent marriage of his son to a neighbor's comely daughter. Now and then his mumbles give vent to violent reflexes in his hands. The fingers grow taut, the thumbs thicken and strain and if there is a throat handy, you feel sorry for it.

Mr. Homolka is all thumbs a number of times, without any dire consequences.

### Moods Rule Action

It is Mr. Homolka's party. As the aberrant parent, he controls the stage all eve-

ning and the play waits for his nervous speeches, his grimaces, outbursts, deliberations, interrogations and contemplative moods just as long as he believes they require to get from where he is to across the footlights. Mr. Homolka can well be laudably about his performance, because so few things happen in Grey Farm to keep it moving that any acceleration by him would end the incident considerably sooner than it lets out now.

Since there is not much for the other players in Grey Farm to do but mollify and humor Mr. Homolka when they are around him, they perform this humanitarian task with modest efficiency and get on and off the stage with decent haste.

These good people include Evelyn Varden, who portrays a housekeeper of incredible forbearance, John Cromwell as a patient son, Jane Sterling as the girl, and Maria Temple, whose throat receives the imprints of Mr. Homolka's irrepressible thumbs for no sane reason. Raymond Sovey has designed a somber setting for the occasion. But it still is Flora Robson, we suspect, who will have to continue to beat chill your spine to a connoisseur's temperature, at Henry Miller's.

GEORGE ROSS.

Reprinted from

NEW YORK TIMES, May 4, 1940

## Daddy Goes A-choking

By BROOKS ATKINSON

SOMETIMES this business verges on the perplexing. Take, for example, "Grey Farm," which was put on at the Hudson last evening. It was written, probably at about half-past three of a rainy morning, by Terence Rattigan, who once wrote "French Without Tears," and Hector Bolitho, who has written prose works about royalty. "Thumbs," they called it. It is the story of a father with a very strange regard for his son. The Oedipus complex it must be, if you insist on the scientific. Daddy goes batty, act by act, saying "I'm sorry" rather too frequently, and finally strangles a servant girl behind the arras. Girdling, what? "Life with father," the lady on the left said sardonically.

There is no doubt about one thing. It got on the stage, where quite a lot of people saw it. Probably Oscar Homolka, a German actor, thought it would be one way of showing what he can do with a case of psychopathic derangement. He can do plenty by taking most of the evening at it and going into all the humorless details. If the son had had his wits about him he would have stopped the old man's conk before 9:30. Raymond Sovey has designed an elaborate setting for the obsequies. Evelyn Varden, Adrienne Morrison, John Cromwell and Jane Sterling trot around dutifully inside it instead of ringing up an asylum, as anybody but an actor would. Daddy was mad, and the audience wasn't too well pleased. That's something else the lady on the left let fly as she hurried to the exit.

# "Love's Old Sweet Song"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, May 3, 1940

## 'Love's Old Sweet Song,' a New Saroyan Opens at the Plymouth

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

WILLIAM SAROYAN tells a pleasantly ga-ga little story in "Love's Old Sweet Song," which opened at the Plymouth last evening, and tinkles the changes on several themes. He celebrates love, of which he entirely approves; he burlesques refugees from the dust bowl, of whom he does not approve; he is occasionally refreshing in his own peculiar style and more often merely silly, also in his own peculiar style. We find Mr. Saroyan, indeed, more or less where we left him a little while ago.

This time he reports on a maiden lady in her forties who was called upon to entertain love and sixteen languid Oklahomans during one California afternoon. Love came in masquerade, and as the result of a rather intricate trick played by one Postal Telegraph boy upon another. The trick leads the lady to confuse a passing pitchman with a mythical suitor named, peculiarly, Barnaby Gaul. But the love is real, and so are the "Okies," who just wander in and settle down in the front yard. The "Okies" are pretty funny, particularly, if you don't mind light-hearted burlesque of real misery and don't remember "Tobacco Road," from which their antics appear to derive.

The messenger boy who started the trouble fixes things up reasonably well at the end, although the house gets burned down and the pitchman has difficulties with a Greek wrestler. Mr. Saroyan and Eddie Dowling, who participated in the direction, keep the stage filled with busy movement. Most of the time a good many amusing little children are doing odd things on it. A period is also

devoted to spoofing Time Magazine, which seems to me a little supererogatory. This spoofing involves reciting the names of the entire staff of the magazine, which Alan Hewitt of the cast does very well indeed. The drama thus takes a new step in one direction or another.

Mr. Saroyan himself takes a fairish step backward with "Love's Old Sweet Song." Disarming as it is, and original as it sometimes is, it is also pretty foolish. The line between the fantastic and the silly is always a difficult one to draw, and no two persons draw it at precisely the same place. But there is a line, and I think Mr. Saroyan has stepped over it. Or, to be more exact, I think he has tripped over it. His invention seems to have flagged, also, and "Love's Old Sweet Song" has a derivative flavor. It derives from earlier Saroyan, among other things.

Walter Huston, with his agreeable swagger and his ingratiating ease, plays the wandering pitchman who finds love, and Miss

### 'LOVE'S OLD SWEET SONG'

A play in three acts by William Saroyan; staged by Eddie Dowling and Mr. Saroyan; settings by Watson Barratt; music by Paul Bowles; presented at the Plymouth Theater on May 2, 1940, by the Theater Guild in association with Mr. Dowling. The cast:

|                            |                     |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Ann Hamilton.....          | Jessie Royce Landis |
| George Americanos.....     | Peter Fernandez     |
| Barnaby Gaul.....          | Walter Huston       |
| Tom Flora.....             | James S. Elliott    |
| Demetrios.....             | Anzi O. Poulos      |
| Cabot Yearling.....        | Arthur Hunnicutt    |
| Leona Yearling.....        | Doro Merande        |
| Newton Yearling.....       | Eugene Flitts       |
| Velma Yearling.....        | Barbara Hastings    |
| Selma Yearling.....        | Ardele Hastings     |
| Al Yearling.....           | Thomas Jordan       |
| Henry Yearling.....        | Eric Roberts        |
| Jesse Yearling.....        | Jackie Ayers        |
| Lucy Yearling.....         | Patsy O'Shea        |
| Ella Yearling.....         | Mae Grimes          |
| Susan Yearling.....        | Patricia Roe        |
| Maud Yearling.....         | Carol Ema           |
| Lemmie Yearling.....       | Bob White           |
| Mae Yearling.....          | Eleanor Drexler     |
| Harry Yearling.....        | Michael Artist      |
| Willbur Yearling.....      | Gerald Matthews     |
| Richard Oliver.....        | Lloyd Gough         |
| Elsa Wax.....              | Beatrice Newport    |
| David F. Windmore.....     | Alan Hewitt         |
| Daniel Hough.....          | John A. Regan       |
| Mr. Smith.....             | Nick Dennis         |
| Mr. Harris.....            | George Travell      |
| Sheriff.....               | Howard Freeman      |
| Stylianios Americanos..... | Alan Reed           |
| Pericles Americanos.....   | John Economides     |

Jessie Royce Landis is gently persuasive as the love-hafinda. Arthur Hunnicutt is drawlingly entertaining as the head of the Okie clan; Doro Merande is comic in a totally relaxed fashion as the migratory wife, and almost all the rest do nicely. Peter Fernandez is a sprightly messenger boy and several of the younger children are engaging enough to wash up and take home. Certainly "Love's Old Sweet Song" is not going to do much to prepare them for adult life.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, May 3, 1940

## Mr. Saroyan Repeats

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

MR. SAROYAN continues to be the freshest and most comforting new voice in the American theater. In his new play, "Love's Old Sweet Song," the antic gentleman from Fresno provides us with a gay and daffy comedy, so richly, humorously and happily mad, so filled with laughter and imagination and warmth, so hearty and yet so curiously tender, that the presumably waning dramatic season takes on new luster. If you want me to be captious, I can say that there are moments in the second act when the invention shows signs of breaking down and that "Love's Old Sweet Song" is not so distinguished and completely delightful a work as "The Time of Your Life." At the same time the difference in quality is by no means great, and the new play offers all of the plot that some seem to have missed in the previous comedy. Here is added proof that Mr. Saroyan is the drama's most important new man, and it is not to be missed by those who appreciate his talents.

Somewhere or other I saw it objected that in his new play Mr. Saroyan had made shabby, malicious and ill-natured fun of those new American folk heroes, the Okies. It seems to me that any such charge is curiously literal-minded and uncomprehending. It is true that "Love's Old Sweet Song" shows a lazy refugee from the dust bowl, his slatternly wife and their innumerable children descending upon a California widow, rifling her closets, occupying her lawn and in general disporting themselves as if they owned the place. It is likewise true that these ma-

rauding Okies are by no means sentimentalized and that their conduct has its deplorable side. The important thing, though, is that under Mr. Saroyan's amusingly affectionate treatment the visitors from Oklahoma become a most engaging and likable set and that the father, who merely lies around on the ground and scratches himself, meanwhile blaming everything on the "movies," is, in his graceless way, one of the most refreshing characters of the year. As Cabot—which, rather strangely, turns out to be his name—says, "the whole country is behind us."

But "Love's Old Sweet Song" is not merely a friendly satire on the Okie invasion. Chiefly it is the story of a well-to-do old maid, who is longing for love, of an itinerant pitchman who wins her fraudulently and of a little messenger boy who enjoys bringing

romance to people. It is filled with a delectable crew of Greek wrestlers, oratorical salesmen for "Time," men with a passion for cutting lawns, befuddled social novelists, bewildered sheriffs, ancient fellows who speak only Greek and innumerable other amiable Saroyanesque people, including that fascinating group of wild Okie children, the best child actors of the year. It is a play filled with hilarious and imaginative and touching episodes. For as comic a scene as the season has offered, I would suggest the incident where the ambitious salesman tries to sell a subscription to "Time" to the impecunious and illiterate Okie by reciting to him the names of the editors and associate editors of that illustrious publication. It will probably surprise both you and the editors to know that their names sound so funny when recited in a group. I recommend to you also a scene wherein the wandering pitchman has various headlocks tried out on him.

Eddie Dowling and the author have staged the play wisely and have splendidly. Walter Huston is perfectly cast as the pitchman, Miss Jessie Royce Landis gives the best performance of her career as the romantic lady, and young Peter Fernandez is Delia as the sentimental messenger boy. Arthur Hunnicutt offers one of the most delightful characterizations of the season as the Okie father; Doro Merande is splendid as his wife, and all of the children—particularly the little one with red hair who sings "happy birthday to you" when she sees lighted candles—are fine. Alan Hewitt handles the scene of the reading of the "Time" honor roll brilliantly; Alan Reed is of vast help as the wrestler; a funny-looking little fellow called Anzi O. Poulos is comic as the lawn cutter, and the others are of proper assistance. Paul Bowles' accompanying score is humorous and imaginative, and Watson Barratt's sets are excellent. Personally, I wish that Saroyan would write a play every week. The chances are, of course, that he will.

# "Love's Old Sweet Song"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, May 3, 1940

## Walter Huston Appears in "Love's Old Sweet Song"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

ALTHOUGH originality is no common commodity, William Saroyan possesses it to an uncommon degree. "My Heart's in the Highlands" and "The Time of Your Life" were eloquent proofs of this. In their different ways, they made clear how fresh is the talent Mr. Saroyan has brought to the theatre's service, how unconventional are his aims and means, how poignant and probing his gift for fantasy can be, with what spurts of revelation he is able to write, how colorful is his humor, how strong is the lyric sense that finds dramatic statement in his plays, and how successful he has been in offering mood as a substitute for plotting as plotting is ordinarily understood.

I catalogue Mr. Saroyan's by-now familiar virtues because one by one they put in their appearance in "Love's Old Sweet Song" at the Plymouth last night. They were all there. But as they crept in singly, like conspirators misinformed as to the time of an important meeting, and as each one disappeared before the next could make a cloaked entrance, there were never enough of them on hand to establish a quorum in Mr. Saroyan's favor.

### A Wasteful Evening

The result was less like sitting before a play than having dropped in one's lap from the stage a series of fragments from a torn surrealist Valentine Mr. Saroyan had forgotten to deliver. Obviously his new comedy benefits at moments from Mr. Saroyan's very genuine and most welcome gifts as it runs its moonstruck course. However mad, incomplete, or downright tiresome it may become, it is plainly the work of a man blessed with imagination.

If, as "Love's Old Sweet Song" trots and

stumbles, stumbles and trots throughout the evening, it seems by all odds the least ingratiating of Mr. Saroyan's plays yet to have been produced, the reasons are not hard to find. Much as I hate to confess it, his newest offering has about it all those slightly, slightly balmy qualities which those who do not admire Mr. Saroyan are fond of ascribing to his plays.

Where in "My Heart's in the Highlands" Mr. Saroyan pointed out man's inescapable hunger for beauty, this time he has again turned to the dispossessed to show nothing more or less than that love conquers all. A pitchman is finally lifted above his charlatanry by falling in love with a good woman. Love does not win, however, until a huge family of worthless Okies have taken over the good woman's home, appropriated her clothes, eaten her food, burned down her house, and a Greek wrestler, his messenger boy son, his old father, and a cousin of uncertain standing have all played their part in the sentimental proceedings.

### A Good Production

Mr. Saroyan's Yearlings are not to be confused with Mr. Steinbeck's Joads. Although both families are described by their creators as being Okies, the Joads would have a hard time recognizing the Yearlings as fellow creatures. Oklahoma cannot be blamed for them. Neither can California for that matter. They are the products of no state except Mr. Saroyan's original state of mind. For truly, the Yearlings are like what the Vanderhoft tribe might have become if it had deserted "You Can't Take It With You" for "Tobacco Road" and indulged in lower mathematics.

Mr. Saroyan's writing can be very funny at moments, even in such a hastily dropped egg as "Love's Old Sweet Song" turns out to be. His gift for caricature has not deserted him. When he is mocking the effect of the movies, rolling off the names of "Time's" editors, spoofing the curiosity of a photographer from "Life," or laughing at a wrestler's physical prowess, his exceptional talents continue to make themselves felt.

But his new play lacks the magic of its predecessors. It holds jokes until they have not only lost their humor but died of old age. It grows tiresome and thin. Its silliness is redeemed by no point. Its confusions have no real beauty behind them. And it suffers from the manifest speed of its composition; a speed which has spared it none of its faults and emphasized only the defects and uncertainties in its point of view no less than in its execution.

Mr. Dowling and Mr. Gough have done their best to hide the flat-footed writing of Mr. Saroyan's newest ballet. Mr. Saroyan and Mr. Dowling have staged it inventively. Walter Huston gives a winning performance as the pitchman, Jessie Royce Landis does the best work of her career as the good spinster. Arthur Hunnicutt and Doro Merande are excellent as the charter members of the talented reciting clan. As the lanky, associate editors, and Peter Fernandes appear as the Okies bearing gifts no one has to beware of. Still haste has made cruel waste in the case of Mr. Saroyan's newest script. The only writing of a bad evening which achieve and sustains the quality Mr. Saroyan must have had in mind is the excellent work Paul Bowles has done in the composition of his fascinating incidental music.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, May 3, 1940

## Walter Huston Appears in William Saroyan's Second Comedy of the Current Season

By BROOKS ATKINSON

THIS man Saroyan will be the death of us yet. In "Love's Old Sweet Song," which was acted at the Plymouth last evening, he has spun some more of his most beguiling improvisations for three acts in length and hired Walter Huston to simulate an amiable charlatan. The improvisations are comic, for Mr. Saroyan is an inventive chap with a liking for folksy and spontaneous fooling. The characters are off the American highways. Mr. Saroyan's attitude toward life is wholly ingratiating; his heart is in the right place; his writing is warming. Why, then, should a person come away from his play with a feeling of vague disappointment, as if nothing had been accomplished? It may be because Mr. Saroyan's mind does not really come to grips with the material he is working with. That may also be the reason why he wastes a heroic actor like Mr. Huston on a part that wastes pleasantly though idly through the play.

"Just relax," he seems to be saying and everything will turn out satisfactory," as Papa Americanos, the wrestler, says. In a homey town in California, a ripening spinster receives a puzzling telegram from an unknown suitor who says he is coming to woo her. The telegram is a fake. But the word "love" intoxicates her. When a pitchman walks by she brightens to him. He is puzzled, too, but love enchants him when he walks into the midst of it. He would have remained with her if a stupendous family of "Okies," with fourteen children, had not plopped down in her dooryard and proceeded to take over her

house. That drives him away. The rest of "Love's Old Sweet Song" disposes very humorously of the "Okies" and finally brings spinster, pitchman, some Greeks and the "Okies" together in harmony with love's old sweet song. Just relax and everything will be satisfactory.

There is a great deal to be said for that inviting point of view. For Mr. Saroyan can have the time of his life when he lets himself go. Toward the spinster he might be satirical if his mind worked in a formula, but he gathers her up in his great fund of friendliness. Her attitude toward the "Okies" is fabulous. The number of their children is fabulous to begin with. Their tired, easy acceptance of life is fabulously triumphant; by doing nothing they inherit the world. Mr. Saroyan has garnished the dish with some remarkable funny gibes at an intellectual who tries to fit the "Okies" into a scientific

pattern and at a college lad who is peddling Time to any one who can make a cross on a subscription blank and who makes the magazine irresistible by the simple device of reciting the entire list of editors, associate editors and editorial assistants. Toss in a Greek wrestler who is also a philosopher and casually demonstrates wrestling holds and you have an evening of humors and the gospel of love.

As directed by Eddie Dowling and Mr. Saroyan the acting is all good humored. If there is a pitchman to play, Old Dr. Huston is the boy to do it. He sweeps blandly and gently through it in a fine, spacious performance, always working uphill against a part that seems most of the time to be outside the play. Jessie Royce Landis gives an excellent, tender performance as the distraught spinster. As the lanky, languid Okie, who describes himself as a "migratory worker," Arthur Hunnicutt is wonderfully amusing; and Doro Merande is lastly comic as the slatternly wife. Lloyd Gough and Beatrice Newport contribute a bright scene as a sociological novelist and sociological photographer, respectively. Something appreciative must be said for Alan Hewitt's variety in his acting of the monotonous part of the Time salesman. Alan Reed needs a word of thanks for his barrel-chested Greek wrestler. Just for the fun of it, Mr. Saroyan has found a room for Angi O. Poulos, who rolls his own character part. To give the comedy an agreeable background, Marion Barratt has designed a workable and lively form of exterior and a hospitable interior in the worst Greek-American taste.

Mr. Saroyan is no faker. He is inventive and original. He is genuinely simple-hearted. His comedy is as funny as vaudeville. Toward the human race his intentions are of the best. But the short, lyrical form is the best measure of his genius so far. In this column's opinion "My Heart's in the Highlands," which seemed closely-woven, is still his best play. Just relaxing is a pleasant pastime, but it results in an ambulant stage diversion that comes to a platitudinous conclusion. Sooner or later, Mr. Saroyan will have to put his mind to work.



# "Love's Old Sweet Song"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, May 3, 1940

## "Love's Old Sweet Song" That Saroyan Boy on Another Bender

"Love's Old Sweet Song," comedy by William Saroyan. Produced by the Theatre Guild in association with Eddie Dowling, at the Plymouth theatre, New York, May 2, 1940.



By BURNS MANTLE

I THINK it would be a fine thing for the experimental theatre if Henry R. Luce, editor of Time, Life and Fortune magazines, for whom William Saroyan, author of last night's "Love's Old Sweet Song," shown at the Plymouth, appears to have some sort of affinity—

I think it would be a fine thing if Mr. Luce would subsidize Mr. Saroyan and let him work off whatever is festering a little uncomfortably upon the Saroyan chest in that theatre.

There is no use trying to dismiss Mr. Saroyan with a shrug merely because you find his theatre experiments a little difficult to take.

He is a new hope in the theatre, as he proved when Eddie Dowling and Lawrence Langner whipped his "The Time of Your Life" into some sort of acceptable shape earlier in the season.

And anyone who leaves a Saroyan play convinced that the young man is as goofy as he frequently sounds has only to buy a copy of the printed version of "Time of Your Life" and read the prefatory statement he wrote to go with it to be disabused of that impression.

### Needs Help

But Mr. Saroyan stands greatly in need of a proper theatre experience that is pretty certain to be costly, both to the theatre and to his backers, not to mention his audiences.

Mr. Saroyan should have his chance, but the cost of it should be assessed against those supporters who have faith in his works, and

not the playgoers who put their faith in the theatre and buy their entertainment in the market sight unseen.

"Love's Old Sweet Song" is a formless sort of satirical comedy fandango having to do with such a family of migratory workers as were dreamed of in John Steinbeck's "Grapes of Wrath." A family of comedy oaks.

Its theme, if you dig deeply enough, appears to be that the thing of which this world stands most in need is love, love and more love.

### Needs Clarifying

Nor is it an untenable theme, nor one to be smugly denied. But it certainly demands and is entitled to a more coherent statement and a more honest treatment than Mr. Saroyan gives it.

Ann Hamilton is a 44-year-old spinster of Bakersfield, Cal. Georgie Americanos is a romantic Postal Telegraph messenger who

delivers her a phony love message from one who signs himself Barnaby Gaul.

Along comes a wandering pitchman, the great Dr. Goodheart, dispenser of nostrums, whom Ann mistakes for her unknown lover.

Along, also, comes Pa and Ma Yearling and sixteen young Yearlings, to camp in Ann's yard and refuse to be budged.

Thereafter these assorted symbols chase each other about Ann's house until they first ruin and then set fire to it.

After which everybody moves on to the home of Georgie Americanos and love conquers all.

The aforementioned Mr. Luce is injected into the proceedings in one of the detached comedy scenes (several of which are genuinely amusing, incidentally) when an agent ballyhooing the Luce publications charms the oaks by reading off the names of the entire Luce editorial staff, and reciting considerable Luce advertising text.

### The Actors

In the cast Jessie Royce Landis seems most completely in the Saroyan confidence as the befuddled Ann. She manages one of those familiar lady drinker scenes admirably.

Walter Huston does what he can for the adventuring pitchman, Arthur Hunicutt is excellent as the Yearling sire, and Doro Merande amusing as his productive wife.

Peter Fernandez plays the Postal boy with spirit, and there are a dozen child types realized with amazing cleverness by the Little Yearlings.

There is considerable off-stage music by Paul Bowles and satisfying settings by Watson Barratt Dowling and the author did the staging. Last night's audience was apparently pro-Saroyan.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, May 3, 1940

## Love's Old Sweet Song Has the Saroyan Lilt

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THAT surprising young man, William Saroyan, has burst cheerfully into the Broadway scene again with another ecstatic interpretation of life which he calls Love's Old Sweet Song, a play that is sure to enliven and brighten the drying days of the theatrical season, if for no other reason than that it again will fan the flames of controversy over his position in the modern theater.

As a play Love's Old Sweet Song stands somewhere between the delirious fantasy of My Heart's in the Highlands and the exquisite humor of The Time of Your Life. It is filled with joyful caricatures of humanity and it tells a coherent story. There is happy satire in it, sometimes at the expense of big and pontifical Business, sometimes at the expense of earnest, meddling social workers and sometimes at the expense of the great and unimaginative middle classes. But its principal charm lies in the hordes of utterly delightful and nearly always irrelevant characters who brighten the stage with the vivid color of their individual personalities. Whenever Saroyan thinks of a new character he can't be kept out of the picture.

Stripped of its irrelevances and insanities, Love's Old Sweet Song tells the story of a 44-year-old spinster whose dream of love is answered by the chance appearance of a patent medicine salesman. The pitchman is frightened away when a host of human termites from Oklahoma descend upon the spinster's house, but he returns to her, conscience and love triumphant, after the house has burned down.

That, however, is nothing but the rickety skeleton of the new Saroyan play. Perhaps, indeed, it is just incidental. The important persons in the play are a messenger boy who is sorry for poor people who get collect telegrams and can't pay for them, and so tells them what is in the wire; and a lovable and futile little man who just wants to cut people's lawns whether they need it or not; and a family man with 14 children, of the same economic status as the Joads, but with a dazed and happy outlook on life; and a Graeco-American wrestler who smokes a hookah and dispenses muscular justice; and an agent for Time Magazine who holds his prospective customers spellbound by the mere recital of the names of the editors; and a little red-headed girl who, when the pitchman lights three candles around his patent medicine display, screams "happy birthday" with spontaneous enthusiasm; and

13 other children of various degrees of size and devility and a lot more.

If you have been oppressed by the miseries of the Joads and their fellow Okies, if you have been weighed down by the social tragedy of the Grapes of Wrath, you will find relieving humor in their relatives, the Yearling family, who represent the Saroyanesque tribe of migrant workers that float into California like a merry band of locusts and genially devour everything within reach. Saroyan permits them to do this—to usurp the spinster's house and garden, to steal her clothes and food, and finally, playing with matches, to burn her home down—but he gives the dear lady something better in return, and that is the love of the patent medicine man. Everything comes out even and life is beautiful.

Walter Huston played the part of the pitchman with his customary vigor but, it seemed to me, with a little less abandon than the part demands or that might have been expected from him. Jessie Royce Landis made a lovely and vivid spinster and the zest with which she entered into the comedy, particularly in the third act, gave the role a mellow and charming quality.

Many others deserve commendation, among them the youngster, Peter Fernandez, as the humanitarian messenger boy; Lloyd Gough, as an indignant writer on sociological subjects; Alan Hewitt, as the glib magazine salesman; Doro Merande, as the apologetic matron of the Yearling family; Alan Reed, as the Hellenic wrestler; and in particular, Arthur Hunicutt, whose discovery that the movies are responsible for families like the Yearlings will go down as one of the high comedy moments of the year.

It would be well, too, to salute Eddie Dowling for his worthy direction. The marshaling of those 14 children on the stage alone is a feat worthy of a major general, but the whole production is beautifully managed and staged with rare imagination. Watson Barratt's sets are fascinating, and I would like to know where he got those family portraits for the living room of Stylianos Americanos, the Graeco-American heavyweight.

# "There Shall Be No Night"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, April 30, 1940

## "There Shall Be No Night" Opens With Lunts Heading Brilliant Cast

By JOHN MASON BROWN

"WHERE life ends, art begins," said Goethe. And so it does, as is known to dwellers in all the sheltered Weimars on this planet. But the line of demarcation Goethe drew was drawn at a time less dark than ours. When he spoke of life ending he was merely establishing a boundary between reality and creation, fact and illusion. War's havoc was not on his mind. His philosophical serenity was not imperilled by the brutal forces of a new barbarism. His "where life ends" was only an aesthetic truism, placidly uttered. It had nothing to do with the death of individuals, or a death toll of small nations that has not stopped with Finland, or with the decencies of civilization now threatened in an appalling world.

Mr. Sherwood has set deliberately about robbing Goethe's truism of its appearance of truth, though not of its truth. It is precisely with all these fresh and symptomatic disasters of the contemporary world that Mr. Sherwood's playwriting begins in "There Shall Be No Night." His drama cannot be separated from the problems and the anguishes of present-day living. The whole point, and often the theatrical effectiveness, of his play is derived from the way in which it manages to make grotesque and the recent barkings of our grade one and the same thing.

### War and Mr. Sherwood

News events now passed into tragic history and unsolved problems, international no less than individual,—these are the subjects Mr. Sherwood has individualized in his drama about the invasion of Finland. Whether he has written a play that would be a good play in a sane epoch seems a purely academic question in the presence of so much that is devastating in his dramaturgy at the Alvin. No doubt it is as academic as another question raised by "There Shall Be No Night." That is, how effective merely as playwriting would his script remain if its scene were Ruretanian rather than Finland, and we did not carry with us into the Alvin these nights the heavy knowledge that civilization is at stake, and that this fragment of recent history Mr. Sherwood has fictionalized is a fact faced by decent people up and down Europe which may yet, God forbid, be faced by us.

In writing of the destruction by the Russians of a cultivated Finnish home, and in describing how a distinguished man of

science, a Nobel Prize winner, loses his son, his charming New England wife, and his own life, after having been forced to abandon reason for a gun, Mr. Sherwood unquestionably continues a familiar dramatic practice of his. Intelligent and capable as he is, Mr. Sherwood has often been more of a journalist than a playwright in the creation of his dramatic emotions. He has depended as heavily on outside events to complete his writing for him as he has on music to furnish him with ready-made climaxes of debatable integrity, though of undeniable effectiveness, for some of his bigger scenes.

Shrewd craftsman though he is, he has often functioned more as a lean-to in the field of the theatre than as a self-reliant dramatist. He has seldom hesitated to rely upon either the advance information of his audiences or such public emotions as they may have felt in advance to fill in his playwriting for him. Queen Marie's visit gave point to "The Queen's Husband." Problems raised by the depression helped complete "The Petrified Forest." The tension in Europe added to the tension of "Idiot's Delight." Our love of Lincoln, plus the timeliness of what he had had to say in defense of democracy, did its full collaborative duty in "Abe Lincoln." Now in the same way, only to an even greater extent, the madness and the tragedies of a world which is all too real serve as a vital part of Mr. Sherwood's playwriting in "There Shall Be No Night."

### An Absorbing Evening

If he is functioning as a propagandist, if he has turned sickening headlines into dialogue, and stated the tragedy of a nation in terms of a single family, let it be quickly

admitted that as a pamphleteer he has succeeded as no other dramatist heard from in this country has succeeded in dealing with the topical alarms and abiding implications of Europe's fever chart. Compare Mr. Sherwood's passionately written script with the no less sincerely written Anti-Nazi plays—"Birthright," "Kultur" and all the rest of them—and you cannot help realizing how much it gains in interest, in dignity, and often in the sheer impact of its results because of Mr. Sherwood's skill.

If at times it is static it is at least becalmed in the interest of good talk. If its ultimate optimism is hard to swallow; if it gets lost in the scenes between its young lovers; if it suffers toward the end by the introduction of too many new characters; if it indulges in such stale tricks as those employed in the episode during which the scientist tries to bring his wife's wandering Finland; and if it does not hesitate to do its preaching straight into a loud-speaker or in an abandoned classroom, "There Shall Be No Night" nonetheless proves absorbing for by far the better portion of one of the season's most arresting and moving evenings.

It is an evening that gains not only from the skill of its editing and the merit of its scattered scenes but because of the fine understatement of its playing. Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne have never acted with greater polish or effect. The two of them in their quiet way capture the heartbreak of all threatened civilization, and suggest the quiet courage which may save it. Richard Whorf, an actor of extraordinary talents, is no less brilliant as an American radio announcer. Sydney Greenstreet as a Polish pianist has about him something of the strength of Sibelius. Mr. Lunt has given the play a fine production and Mr. Whorf has set it admirably.

Whatever the ultimate literary merits "There Shall Be No Night" may prove to be, and at the Alvin it is an irrelevant consideration, Mr. Sherwood's play provides an evening not to be missed. It is an evening praiseworthy in its restraint and often genuinely poignant in its dramatization of topical ills; an evening that is frequently as moving as the tragic news it has dramatized. No one can complain about the theatre's being an escapist institution when it conducts a class in current events at once as touching, intelligent, and compassionate as "There Shall Be No Night."

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, April 30, 1940

## Men in War

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

OUT of his bitterness, his indignation and his hope, Robert E. Sherwood has written the first play of the second World War, a lofty and passionate tragedy of the assault on Finland, which he calls "There Shall Be No Night." There are times when the new work seems uncomfortable in its incidents and overabundant in its talk; scenes in which the interest and the emotions appear to lag, and sections where the narrative seems uncomfortably static. In at least one place, I suspect the author of being somewhat less than historically rigorous. "There Shall Be No Night" is not a tidy nor a consistent play. Yet it is a play of stature, dignity and high emotion, thoughtful, eloquent and heartfelt, and it is brilliantly acted by the Lunts and an admirable cast. It has something of great contemporary import to say to what we call our civilization, and it speaks from both the mind and the heart.

Although "There Shall Be No Night" is bitter and brooding tragedy, filled with the blackest of pessimism, it is not without its dogged traces of wry optimism. Mr. Sherwood, who seemed to despair of the modern world in such

peace-time works of his as "The Petrified Forest" and "Idiot's Delight," has begun to hope again in the midst of war and encroaching barbarism. It is a very slight sort of hope that he has to offer, but to him it is a welcome glimmer in the murkiness of a new Dark Age. Man may be showing signs of returning to the ape and of hastening gleefully to a new era of blood and savagery, but in one way he does show evidence of progress. He no longer believes in the heroism and the beauty of war. He knows now that it is hideous and degrading, and when he fights he at least does so with his eyes open and an understanding of what he does in his heart. Even the totalitarian warrior must now find some excuse for what he must know is evil. Thus it may be says Mr. Sherwood's protagonist as he goes out to die in the hopeless fighting around Viipuri, that ours is not the final day of civilization, but the last stand of barbarism.

This protagonist is a Nobel prize-winning scientist, an eminent Finnish neurologist who had devoted his life to a study of the mental diseases in man and who held on to the pessimistic fear that as civilization conquered the physical ailments of the world it was succumbing to the more terrible ones of a mental and spiritual nature. War and excessive patriotism were alien to him, yet when Finland is invaded he dies for his country, still seeing the absurdity of war but, amid all his heart-

(Continued on page 466)

# "There Shall Be No Night"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, April 30, 1940

## Robert E. Sherwood's 'There Shall Be No Night' Brings Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne Back to Town in a Drama About Finland's Resistance

By BROOKS ATKINSON

MR. SHERWOOD is speaking a good word for the truth. In "There Shall Be No Night," which was acted at the Alvin last evening, he is trying to look through the black mists of war to the spirit of man that still lives back there somewhere. Taking an attractive family of civilized Finns he has projected them, cool of head, into a doomed defense against Russian invasion and he has commented at length on the meaning of these tragic times. As a play "There Shall Be No Night" is no masterpiece; it has a shiftless second act and less continuity of story than one likes to see. It does not hang together particularly well.

But as acted by Mr. Lunt and Miss Fontanne with thoroughly awakened sincerity it is on the whole enormously impressive. There by the grace of God goes some of the spiritual agony that torments enlightened men today. For Mr. Sherwood is primarily a man of integrity. He has underwritten the play; he has eschewed the flamboyant showmanship that made "Idiot's Delight" a popular favorite. Two or three times in the new drama he has written down his private reflections about mankind in war-time in the simple, ardent prose of his best style. There is nothing cynical, cheap or shallow in his portrait of the ordeal of a brave nation. Out of the bottom of his heart he has faced the philosophy of the war today with the best counsel of which a man of principle is capable.

He is chronicling the experiences of an eminent Finnish scientist, Dr. Valkonen, who has just won the Nobel Prize for his study of the mind. He is married to an American woman; they have one son who is of military age. An uncommonly civilized person with enormous Christian faith, Dr. Valkonen is optimistic in general and immune to the common hysterias. He does not believe that the Russians will

fight. Even if they did, he believes that resistance would be reckless and stupid. But the war closes in about him. His son goes into the army. Faced with a practical situation he has hardly bothered to contemplate he plunges in with his countrymen. In the last act Mr. Sherwood gives him an opportunity to justify himself and to bring his faith up to the fighting front. For men who fight barbarism, not for glory but humbly to preserve the tradition of freedom, carry the world one step further, he says, and help to fulfill the destiny of civilization.

The topic is a big one. Moreover Mr. Sherwood plunged into it a few months ago when the story of the Finnish resistance was hot in his mind. Those are generally not the circumstances in which perfect works of art are created, and "There Shall Be No Night" is no exception. But Mr. Sherwood has admirably created the atmosphere of a wholesome family, which is the basis of the play. Part of it is humorous; all of it is affectionate. The whole thing has the feeling of modern times. When the war begins Mr. Sherwood has more difficulty in revealing character from the in-

side rather than by external circumstances, and the play loses the direction of the splendid first act. But the events are too poignantly true to be resisted by the usual cant of criticism. In the last act Mr. Sherwood twice pulls the whole thing together with magnificent statements of what goes on in the mind of an enlightened man confronted with the destruction of his aspirations. Although the Finnish campaign is now over, Denmark and Norway are part of the same story.

If Mr. Sherwood's craftsmanship is often uncertain, the Lunts' are unexceptionable. Aroused by the sincerity of the play, they and their associates are acting it beautifully. Mr. Lunt, who was fooling with Shakespeare a while ago, looks the part of Dr. Valkonen straight in the face and acts it with impersonal sobriety and understanding, not forgetting to speak the contemplative passages with driving precision. As Mrs. Valkonen, Miss Fontanne plays with a light touch in the early scenes and a gallantry in the later ones that round out a completely articulate character. This is one of her finest characterizations.

Richard Whorf also devotes his best acting to the part of an honest radio commentator. Sydney Greenstreet gives a fine-grained portrait of an aging Finnish patriot. Montgomery Clift has grown up to the part of the son and plays it well. Excepting a hackneyed scene of hysteria, Elisabeth Fraser gives a pleasant performance as the daughter-in-law. Maurice Colbourne is excellent in the character part of a Nazi consul.

Mr. Whorf's scene design for a gracious, well lighted living-room represents excellent cooperation with author and actors. Valentina's costumes also add life to the performance. Although "There Shall Be No Night" is uneven drama, it honors the theatre and the best parts of it speak for the truth with unkindling faith and passionate conviction.

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, April 30, 1940

## 'There Shall Be No Night,' With The Lunts, Opens at the Alvin

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

IN "There Shall Be No Night," which opened at the Alvin last evening, Robert Sherwood has written with deep compassion of a little family in beleaguered Finland and of the tragedy which crushed in it all but a tiny, unborn hope for the future. Writing of these—of a physician who believed in man, and of his wife and of their son—he has written, too, of all humanity beleaguered by what is bestial in man. It is a moving play, thoughtfully written and beautifully played by Alfred Lunt, Lynn Fontanne and the others in the cast.

Sherwood shows us the Valkonens in days of peace. Dr. Valkonen, a psychiatrist, hopes for man's sanity even in a rising tide of unreason. The wife, American born, believes in life. Their son, although he is working on the Mannerheim Line, believes that ideals still live in Russia and that the times still offer a chance for love and simple work. Then war sweeps over them, engulfing them all. The physician, who is profoundly aware of the insanity of war and of its futility, dies in a hopeless battle outside Viipuri. The son is killed with his troop in the north. The woman lays a fire for lighting in the basement of their house in Helsinki and loads a rifle to use if the invaders come.

This small plot is enriched by feeling and sympathy, so that the Valkonens are vivid and moving on the stage as gallant, suffering humans. But beyond them Sherwood lets us glimpse the larger world. A Nazi diplomat advances his, and the author's, theory that in Finland the Soviets wear but a pass for the German wildcat, and that for the first time since all the surface of the world has been explored a nation seeks dominance and the enslavement of the world. Against this,

Mr. Sherwood argues directly and by implication all mankind must stand. Specifically he is contemptuous of this country's refusal to take a stand against what one of the characters, and again probably the author, feels to be the anti-Christ.

And in all this Mr. Sherwood finds hope—hope because men are grimly standing to arms, without thought of glory, to confront this newest exemplification of the beast in man; hope that mankind may be refined to humanity by this latest conflagration, set by these most recent pyromaniacs. Mr. Sherwood, it may be, whistles in the dark.

It is with this whistling that the play falters. When he seeks reassurance in the events he pictures, Mr. Sherwood slides into the tentative. This is more a matter of philosophy, probably, than of dramatic values. Possibly the human mind will not stretch far enough to put a band of meaning about the present madness. Possibly Mr. Sherwood should have given his thoughts more time to jell. But, whatever the reason, "There Shall

### 'THERE SHALL BE NO NIGHT'

A play in three acts by Robert E. Sherwood, staged by Alfred Lunt; settings by Richard Whorf; costumes by Valentina; presented at the Alvin Theatre on April 29, 1940, by the Playwrights Company and the Theatre Guild. The cast: Dr. Kaarlo Valkonen.....Alfred Lunt  
Miranda Valkonen.....Lynn Fontanne  
Dave Corwee.....Richard Whorf  
Uncle Waldemar.....Sydney Greenstreet  
Qua Shuman.....Brooks West  
Erik Valkonen.....Montgomery Clift  
Kaatri Alquist.....Elisabeth Fraser  
Dr. Ziemassen.....Maurice Colbourne  
Major Rutkowski.....Edward Raquello  
Joe Burnett.....Charles Anley  
Ben Gichner.....Thomas Gessel  
Frank Olmstead.....William Le Massena  
Sergeant Gouden.....Claude Horton  
Lempi.....Phyllis Thaxter  
Hms.....Charva Chester  
Photographer.....Ralph Nelson  
Photographer.....Robert Downing

Be No Night" is marred, and I think gravely marred, by inconclusiveness. Its human story is moving and real; its speculations interesting but rather confused and perhaps not very profound.

It is superlatively acted. Alfred Lunt, given a part of wide scope, acts with what seems to be all under the influence of his performance, to be a new simplicity and sincerity. There is a quietness, and an emotional sureness in his playing. Miss Fontanne's part is more given the but she brings to the similar directness, and she makes her Miranda a person of great gallantry and courage. Richard Whorf acts the part of a news broadcaster, who ties these people in with the outer world, and gives a modulated, sensitive performance. Sydney Greenstreet, Maurice Colbourne, Edward Raquello, Montgomery Clift and Elisabeth Fraser are among the others who give the play vitality.

Mr. Sherwood has written beautifully and with intensity. I wish he had thought longer, and more slowly. The theater can, after all, safely give the headlines a long head start.



# "There Shall Be No Night"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, April 30, 1940

## "There Shall Be No Night," With Lunt and Fontanne, Stirs Audience

"There Shall Be No Night," drama by Robert E. Sherwood. Produced by the Playwrights' Company, in association with the Theatre Guild, at the Alvin Theatre, New York, April 29, 1940.

★ ★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

PLAYS have been written out of passion, and out of prejudice. Plays have been written as the result of a sudden flare of sympathy for a cause, or from the urge of an inspiration that would not be denied.

"There Shall Be No Night," which Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, shepherded by the Playwrights' Company and the Theatre Guild, brought to the Alvin Theatre last night, is a Robert Sherwood answer to the promptings of practically all these influences.

It is a drama of our time, of the day before yesterday, into which has been poured not only the burning convictions of the author, but the impassioned and truly begotten personal sympathies of its leading players.

It seems to me, therefore, that it is an outstanding contribution, not only to this particular theatre season, but to this particular time in the history of a fumbling world.

"There Shall Be No Night" is the story of an embattled Finland making the first desperate stand of small nations against the assaults of the dictatorships.

### Man's Problem

But more than that it is the statement of an intelligent human who believes he may have found some little part of the answer to that incredible problem that all thinking humans have faced from the dawn of the age of reason, whenever that may have been.

Why must men periodically destroy that which they have laboriously achieved in the fatuous and ignorant belief that in destruction lies the secret of progress and civilization?

Originally the Sherwood play was called "Revelation," and its theme still embraces a plea for the perfect revelation that shall reveal man to himself.

The play's text and title are from the book of Revelations: "And they shall see His face and His name shall be in their forehead. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord giveth them light and they shall reign forever and ever."

### Good Drama

However, there are dramatic values in the recital that are not obscured by the weightiness of the theme nor the impassioned convictions of authors and players.

The story of Dr. Kaarlo Valkonen, his wife and son, dating from the first rumblings of Russia's threat against Finland, is as thrillingly dramatic as any story your commentator may tell you over the radio or your paper's editor print on his first page.

Dr. Valkonen is a great scientist, a winner of the Nobel prize for his work in the treatment of mental diseases. He is convinced that the world must be saved through the awakening of the intelligence and by the arousing of the defenses of the inner man.

He fights with all his might against the belief in war and the resort to war, fights the enthusiasms of his patriotic son, but being forced to become a participant, he goes to his defeat courageously and with that nobility of character defeat still cannot conquer.

The moving appeal of this little family's destruction is poignantly real. It follows the pattern of drama without once succumbing to the cheaper conventions of the theatre.

### Superb Staging

It embraces scenes superbly staged—a scene of the Doctor's broadcast to America, in which his philosophies are eloquently stated; the scene of his final pathetic but vigorous statement of his belief in a little schoolhouse at the front.

Even in such a familiar scene as that of his parting with his son there is no tinge of pathos nor of a flimsy theatricalism. "There Shall Be No Night," accepted as preaching or stage play, is a masterly work stirringly projected.

There is the same consistent eloquence and conviction in the playing. Mr. Lunt has never, in a long and fine career, been more perfectly the superior actor, Miss Fontanne is, every minute, his staunchest support. Richard Whorf provides a perfect reflection of naturalistic acting. Sidney Greenstreet, Elizabeth Fraser and the others are equally helpful.

The settings, too, are by Mr. Whorf, and impressive. Last night's audience was visibly moved and tremendously appreciative.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, April 30, 1940

## Lunts' New War Play a Deeply Moving Drama

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

ROBERT E. SHERWOOD, whose study of Abraham Lincoln last year summoned Americans to a reconsideration of the foundations of their own democracy, this year attacks in a direct, vigorous and profoundly moving fashion, those forces which, sweeping almost unchallenged over Europe, are on the way to destroying the entire civilization of the Old World.

The scene of his new play, *There Shall Be No Night*, is in Helsinki. Since it was written, Denmark and Norway have crumbled before the Thing he fears and hates, and the implications of it become 10 times more dramatic and prophetic. It would be

either a cynical or an ignorant man who could listen to Mr. Sherwood, hear the testimony of his characters and witness his imaginative conclusions without being overwhelmed by a grave sense of the world's danger.

Yet, for all its tragedy, there is running through this play a thread of hope. You will not find it too clearly defined. The hope does not lie in American intervention, or in our sales of bombing planes to the victims, or in giving our physical and moral support to one side or the other. It lies in the expressed belief that democratic ideals can never be completely obliterated, and that before the entire human race is reduced to complete and brutish enslavement, it will revolt and rise again.

"Men will ask why and where they are marching."

Mr. Sherwood's principal character, a dis-

tinguished scientist named Dr. Kaarlo Valkonen, recipient of the Nobel prize and one of Finland's great men, refuses to believe that this is the end of the Christian era. It is, on the other hand, the climax of an age of scientific miracle and the beginning of a new age of enlightenment, understanding and brotherhood. That is his creed and he clings to it in the face of death, even when he is called upon to lay down the ideals of the physician and take up the gun, in defense of Viipuri. It is repeated after his death, in his last letter to his wife, and it is said so beautifully and touchingly that in the end it becomes the dominant theme.

The importance of America in the regeneration of the world and its restoration to sanity is emphasized by Mr. Sherwood's introduction, as one of his strongest characters, of an American woman as Dr. Valko-

nen's wife. By her action at the final curtain, when she is waiting with a rifle in her Helsinki home to die in its defense, as her son and husband have died on the Mannerheim line, I think Mr. Sherwood makes plain his belief that America is and must be vitally involved in the last stand of democracy against the doctrine of brute force, whenever and wherever that last stand will be.

Mr. Sherwood's characters, in the hands of Alfred Lunt, Lynn Fontanne, Richard Whorf, Sydney Greenstreet, are human, real, vivid and alive. Do not, merely because this story is the story of Finland, expect to see quaint or "foreign" or strange and outlandish people in it. They are humans. Do not, also, expect to hear any mock heroics about the nobility of little Finland in its stand against the Soviets, nor any exalted talk of patriotism or willingness to die. The restraint with which Mr. Sherwood makes his thesis clear, particularly when you consider the deep sense of hurt and injury that must have moved him during its writing, makes his play the more powerful.

Such a play, in the hands of the Lunts, provides a new peak for the theatrical season. Mr. Lunt's characterization is certainly his finest of recent years, a solid, substantial, deeply moving performance. Miss Fontanne, in striking contrast to the lighter, gayer roles through which she has so magnificently romped, is in the subdued character of the wife and mother. She brings out its poignancy in a demonstration of quiet power that overflows the emotions of her audience.

Mr. Whorf, adding further distinction to his already high place in the Lunt organization, not only gave a faithful and believable portrayal of a war correspondent, but must be credited with the excellent settings. Mr. Greenstreet's extraordinary competence was again demonstrated, and the remainder of the cast, including young Montgomery Clift and Elizabeth Fraser, a newcomer to Broadway, showed smart appreciation of Mr. Lunt's able direction.

# "Heavenly Express"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, April 19, 1940

## 'Heavenly Express,' an Uncertain Fantasy, Opens at the National Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THERE is a ghost train which howls over the tracks some nights, while the stars fall and there are mournful hootings. Vagabonds and the friends of vagabonds take passage on it and are carried to the hobo paradise, where bees buzz in the cigarette trees, close to the lemonade fountain, and where, more virilely, whisky seeps from rocks. This train is called the "Heavenly Express" and so is the play Albert Bein has written more or less about it.

Mr. Bein's play, which is drenched in fantasy, opened last evening at the National Theater. John Garfield, capering with charm, played the ghostly role of the Overland

Kid, who has been dead a matter of nineteen years and is now serving as advance ticket taker for the supernatural streamliner. Miss Aline MacMahon played, with that touching gentleness of hers, the part of a woman who sorrows for her hobo son and feeds all men of the road and in the end is transported to mother and cook for the "bos" in their land of delight, where expresses race with comets and tramps are encouraged to ride the blinds.

And Harry Carey returns after many years in the movies to act the part of an engineer who has always been kind to hobos, and who is rewarded, one snowy night, by the wildest ride that ever an engineer took—a ride which carries him out of winter, into a land of birds and tall soft grass and returns him to Winslow on the Santa Fe in a rather confused state of mind. Philip Loeb, strangely transformed, is a bearded tramp and Russell Collins is a sane

and sensible section chief who can't make head or tail of any of this. I have a sneaking sympathy for Mr. Collins in his perplexity.

Mr. Bein, it seems to me, has become enamored of fantasy for the sake of fantasy, and is suffering from that myopia which traditionally accompanies love. There are odd moments of shimmer in the play, but for the most part it is confused and purposeless. Almost never does it attain that beauty of speech and imagination which can make the fantastic so exciting when it is written by some one poetically keyed to fantasy. "Heavenly Express" is the legendary cooked up while you wait, and except in moments of song and tableau, it has the spurious flavor common to such short-order myths. Its story is fragmentary and its purpose unclear.

Under Robert Lewis's direction, most of

### 'HEAVENLY EXPRESS'

A play in three acts by Albert Bein; directed by Robert Lewis; settings and costumes by Boris Aronson; music by Lehman Engel; presented at the National Theater on April 18, 1940, by Kermit Bloomgarden. The cast:

|                          |                  |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| Tommy                    | Phil Brown       |
| Stumpy                   | William Sands    |
| Methuselah Mike          | Art Smith        |
| A Young Tramp            | John Garfield    |
| The Melancholy Bo        | Curt Conway      |
| Bullhead Anderson        | Harry Bratsburg  |
| Ed Peeto                 | Harry Carey      |
| Dan                      | Randolph Wade    |
| Shorty Rucker            | Will Lee         |
| Rocky Mountain Red       | Philip Loeb      |
| Fred Norman              | Russell Collins  |
| Night Telegraph Operator | James O'Rear     |
| Julio                    | Nicholas Conte   |
| Betsy Graham             | Aline MacMahon   |
| Pat Borlie               | Burl Ives        |
| Andy Cameron             | John O'Malley    |
| Steve Corrigan           | Jack Lambert     |
| Scotty Thompson          | Charles Thompson |

the actors are encouraged to display a rather feverish fancifulness, save when they pause in self-consciously stylized groupings. Not knowing precisely what Mr. Bein wanted, I am willing to assume he may have wanted this, but it does not seem to me enhance the effectiveness of his play. Miss MacMahon's playing does; that of Mr. Garfield, whose performance is high pitched and rather flutery, does not, except at the very end.

Mr. Loeb and several of the others act with an energy which rather carries them beyond the play's confines. But Mr. Carey, like Miss MacMahon, plays more simply and sometimes gets into his acting the authentic feeling of a man whose frightened hair is ruffled by supernatural winds. But it takes more than a few such moments to make fantasy, and "Heavenly Express" is generally disappointing.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, April 19, 1940

## John Garfield and Aline MacMahon Appearing in Albert Bein's 'Heavenly Express'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

SPEAKING of experiments, there is Albert Bein's "Heavenly Express," which was acted at the National last evening. Not since "My Heart's In the Highlands" confounded the town a year ago has Broadway inherited such a freely imaginative play. For Mr. Bein, a graduate hobo in good standing and one-time author of "Let Freedom Ring," has written a genuine fantasy of death in vagabond vernacular. Since it is not a literal play, this column cannot give you a literal report of all that happens. But any one can see that the characters are uncommonly exuberant. Any one with ears can appreciate the wild imagery of the writing and the rolling gusto of the road ballads that march through it.

Mr. Bein is no dilettante. His hoboes are vagrants with pride in their calling. His railroad men are a race apart, talking a jargon that has the ring of metal in it. From Mr. Bein's point of view, all his characters are heroes of travel and the one-of-a-kind. Bob Lewis, who directed "My Heart's In the Highlands," has recaptured the same magic in his staging of this tall tale of God's special devotion to the tramp brotherhood. There is some wonderful acting in the performance. Boris Aronson has caught the spirit admirably in his inventive settings. Lehman Engel has composed some chants and eerie sounds that lift "Heavenly Express" off the

tracks. Call it "experiment," because every part of the play is not equally vital or eloquent. But share in the joy of a number of theatre people who have expressed in the drama a freedom and exultation that pedestrian imitations of humanity cannot equal. It is creative; that is the point.

In the beginning, three hoboes are crouching over a fire in a snowstorm, under a gigantic railroad trestle. Among other things, they are talking of a fabulous tramp, the Overland Kid, now dead, and of the Heavenly Express that sweeps all honest hoboes to a special paradise. While they are mauling, the Overland Kid returns in the at-

tractive person of John Garfield, who carries a mandolin and sings hobo ballads. The rest of Mr. Bein's play tells how reports of the Heavenly Express come in over the wires of the Santa Fe, dislocate traffic, drive the railroad men insane with worry. Nothing the railroad men can do can switch it to a siding or clear the line. Somewhere in the night it picks up Melancholy Bo, whose number is up, and drives up with radiance and music to pick up his mother in a railroad boarding-house. Ordinary men fear it, but the hoboes believe in it and know that it gives them the ride of their lives to an ideal country.

There is some acting in "Heavenly Express" that this theatregoer, for one, would not want to miss. As the Overland Kid, Mr. Garfield plays with a glow of youth and a touch of Ariel—altogether the most winning angel of death in the theatre. Aline MacMahon plays a benevolent old patroness of the hoboes with the fine patience and depth that distinguish her acting. Harry Carey, rejoining the theatre after a little matter of thirty-four years, plays an aged locomotive engineer with seasoned authority. Some of the minor parts are acted with particular relish. Philip Loeb has never been funnier. Art Smith is solemnly amusing as Methuselah Mike, a ruminative vagrant. As an alarmed and officious traffic manager, Russell Collins makes a good background for Mr. Bein's moonbeams. Harry Bratsburg is robustly comic as a braggart railroad man.

To say that "Heavenly Express" is too long, too sprawling and undeveloped in detail would doubtless be a sage observation, worthy the dignity of criticism. But matters of that sort are of academic interest only. For the important thing is that the characters are original, earthy, independent and mad. They talk like nothing in the polite storybooks. For once the theatre is truly imaginative. Neither Mr. Bein nor his actors imitate mankind abominably.

# "Heavenly Express"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, April 19, 1940

## 'Heavenly Express' Sympathetic Allegory of a "Bo's" Paradise

"Heavenly Express," allegorical drama by Albert Bein. Produced by Kermit Bloomgarden at the National Theatre, New York, April 18, 1940.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

**L**IKING the allegorical drama, you will not ask to know all that Albert Bein may have had in mind when he wrote "Heavenly Express." Any more than you insisted upon having a complete diagrammatic report of Casella's "Death Takes a Holiday" or Sutton Vane's "Outward Bound."

It is enough to know that Mr. Bein, having been a "Bo" himself and near to death on one occasion, when he slipped between two box cars and lost a leg, has fancied such a completion of his journey as might have taken him the rest of the way to heaven and brought his disembodied spirit back to earth as a representative of the Almighty Vagabond.

There were moments at the National theatre last night when I was inclined to believe that the impish son of heaven played by John Garfield might represent another unregenerate spirit from a Hobo's Paradise at the fringe of Purgatory, whence Lillom hails

### Happy Bo

He was a happy "bo," given to Puck-like attitudes and quizzical grimaces. He sat cross-legged on tables and stools, strumming a mandolin and smiling at the confusion of the railroaders his presence confounded when he told them he was the Overland Kid. The Overland

Kid had fallen from a freight nineteen years before, rolled down an embankment just beyond the bend, and was killed. They knew that.

He had come as a messenger of death to bring Granny Graham and her son, the Melancholy Bo, home on the one-way Heavenly Express that huffed and puffed and whistled and stopped at his command. But only those who were ready to go recognized him.

The Melancholy Bo was ready, and went out in the prologue, an eerie scene under a Santa Fe trestle, lighted imaginatively by Michael Gordon.

Granny Graham was ready, and died in her

chair, with her arms crossed and a tired smile upon her expectant face, as the Overland Kid sang to her and halted the Heavenly Express while her spirit clambered aboard.

There is a kind of eloquence in much of the text, and in most of the acting, for all the theme is vague and unclarified. The characters are strange but have been kept in a groove of acceptable realism by Robert Lewis, the director. This makes for a nice contrast with the allegorical aspects of the recital.

### Good Performances

Young Mr. Garfield's Overland Kid is alive with enthusiasm and a complete belief in his author and himself. He has a sensitive feeling for characterization within his range, as he proved first in "Having Wonderful Time" and later repeated in his picture work.

Aline MacMahon is beautifully sympathetic in his support and again justifies this reporter's belief that she is one of America's really fine actresses.

Harry Carey, back from many years of pictures, mostly Westerns, has a nice role for Harry Carey, playing a sympathetic engineer. Philip Loeb adds a touch of wholesome and useful comedy to the role of an aging bo.

Russell Collins represents the would-be tough railroad executives and Harry Bratsburg adds real character value to a fellow known as "Bullhead."

The sets are by Boris Aronson and helpful, and an incidental musical score by Lehman Engel nicely emphasizes the Bein theme.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, April 19, 1940

## "Heavenly Express" at The National Theatre

By WILLELLA WALDORF

**K**ERMIT BLOOMGARDEN, business manager of the Group Theatre, made his debut as an independent producer last night at the National with Albert Bein's play, "Heavenly Express," which has been en route to Broadway now for something like eight years. It is the sort of play and production that had homeward bound first-nighters arguing its merits and demerits on street corners in the rain, and most people are going to feel pretty definitely one way or the other about it. Either you're going to enjoy it quite a lot, or you're going to think it one of the silliest, most bewildering messes the theatre has cooked up in half a dozen seasons.

Put this reviewer down among the Ayes. Although Mr. Bein originally wrote "Heavenly Express" as far back as 1932, and it has been tried out hither and yon several times, we knew very little about it last night beyond the fact that it was said to be a fantasy about hoboes.

"Heavenly Express," however, devotes only one scene in the great outdoors, with railroad trestles overhead. Then it shifts to Betsy Graham's boarding house for railroad men at Winslow, Ariz., and stays there while the Overland Kid comes in from the Hoboes' Paradise to collect a passenger for the Express.

### The Kid Returns

The Overland Kid had been last seen nineteen years before pitching headlong into a canyon when a brakeman chased him along a string of icy cars, but Rocky Mountain Red, who used to be his hobo buddy, recognizes him again, and so does old Ed Peeto, the engineer who always believed in giving tramps a free ride even if it was strictly against the rules. The Kid is now advance ticket taker for the Heavenly Express, and he drops in for one of Grandma Graham's Mulligan Pies, picks up his passenger for the Hobo Paradise and

signals for the Special to come ahead.

The Overland Kid, of course, is a near relative of that mysterious Mr. Brink who was chased up a tree a couple of seasons ago in "On Borrowed Time," and "Heavenly Express" succeeds in stirring up many of the same emotions in its audience. It is not, to be sure, as impressive either as play or production as was the earlier work, but it had, for us, some of the suspense, the humor and the charm of Paul Osborn's play, although the background is, of course, entirely different. Mr. Bein manages to dramatize in addition something of the eerie feeling, the spirit of romance and of adventure that occasionally strikes one in a railroad yard, or on hearing a distant train whistle in the night. And he has tossed in all sorts of hobo lore, songs and legends.

### Some Good Acting

Robert Lewis, who directed William Saroyan's first play on Broadway, "My Heart's in the Highlands," understands this sort of thing very well, and it seemed to us that he managed to keep it remarkably alive and moving last night. There will be those who consider that John Garfield as the Overland Kid does too much Puckish bounding and leaping, and that the railroad background lacks a realistic touch, but it seemed to us that John Garfield made the Overland Kid an always interesting and attractive figure even when called upon to imitate a train after the fashion of Mr. Reginald Gardiner of revue fame.

Aline MacMahon has several touching moments as Betsy Graham, whose son ran away years before and became a hobo, and whose Mulligan Pies are known to hoboes everywhere—though they have to do a good deal to earn one. Harry Carey, back from a long season on the screen, gave an excellent performance as the aging engineer who took his freight out on that fateful night, and Philip Loeb had a regular old slap-stick comedy interlude in the first act as Rocky Mountain Red. The rest of the company, mostly recruited from the Group Theatre, was uniformly good.



# "Heavenly Express"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, April 19, 1940

## Heavenly Express Study In Reality and Fantasy

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

**A**S IS well known to all good citizens of hobo jungles, there is a hobo's paradise just around the bend from the last water tank, where cigarets grow on trees, lemonade fountains abound, and gushing streams of whisky flow from cool rocks. It is reached by the heavenly express, that highballs down from the clouds to the accompaniment of falling stars and a chorus of coyotes. In its rushing passage to earth, to pick up its world-weary travelers, the heavenly express is apt to disrupt earthly traffic and cause great annoyance to dispatchers, train masters and railroad detectives. This delights the hobo.

That is the legend, carrying a heavy burden of whimsy and sentimentality, that is told by Albert Bein in his new play, *Heavenly Express*, which Kermit Bloomgarden presented last night at the National Theater. The story is inherently fascinating, but its developments by Mr. Bein leaves much to be desired and the net achievement is disappointing.

*Heavenly Express* is confusing, almost from the outset, because of its abrupt swing from reality to fantasy. It fails to ease the spectator into that indulgent mood where he is willing to accept it as a flight of imagination. And it bears too heavily on the wandering-boy and gray-haired-mother theme to be truly effective. In other words, it is strangely overwritten and, equally strangely in view of

the excellent cast, violently overplayed, especially in its leading role.

Death, if we believe Mr. Bein, is pictured by the hoboes as a sort of unmannerly young gay-cat, but off in his heroic prime when he was chased from the top of an ice-covered train by a hostile trainman. Like our old friend Mr. Brink of *On Borrowed Time*, he appears here, there and everywhere as the advance ticket-taker on the heavenly express, arranging the train schedule and making sure of the passengers. Unlike Mr. Brink, he is impudent, brazen, sometimes even vindictive in his selection of the candidates for paradise or the other express to hell.

Mr. Bein is not so comfortable when he deals with matters of sentiment as when he touches on the human, if sometimes grim,

comedy of the bum's relationship to the outer world. In his working out of the fantastic snarl of traffic over the Rocky Mountain divisions that results from the passage of the heavenly express, in his staged description of the "real" train that left an Arizona station in a snowstorm and ran into green meadows, lush valleys and dazzling summer foliage, returning with grass on its driving wheels as proof of its strange journey; in his exposition of the eternal war—and sometimes eternal friendship—between the hoboes and the railroaders, he is both vivid and entertaining.

Mr. Bein, who himself has come out of the jungles, is a keen and intelligent observer, and many of his situations and speeches show a high sense of comedy. There is so much that is pleasant in his work that one is inclined to be lenient with its shortcomings.

Boris Aronson's settings are good, but the mechanical effects are—well, mechanical.

John Garfield plays the role of the hoboes' Mac Brink exuberantly and with over-much leaping about. A sort of overgrown Peter Pan, if you get the idea. Miss Aline MacMahon did her best with the gray-haired lady role the gray-haired lady who is taken up to paradise by the heavenly express because the Great Vagabond decided the boys up there needed mothering—but the character itself is vague and weak and gives her little opportunity to demonstrate her undoubted talent. Harry Carey is convincing as an over-aged engineer.

Two performances, however, stand out head and shoulders above the others. They are those of that excellent comedian, Philip Loeb, who gives a roaring performance of a shaggy hobo, and of Harry Bratsburg, in an equally noisy portrayal of a railroad man. Russell Collins adds materially to the proceedings as a cruel and unimaginative station master and Art Smith, seen briefly in the first scene, gives an amusing and sound performance.

As a whole, however, *Heavenly Express* is flagged down by too many unnecessary stops. It doesn't roll.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, April 19, 1940

## Death Is a Hobo

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

**A**LTHOUGH there must be a good play in the sagas and legends of the hoboes, and Albert Bein would seem to be the man to write it, Mr. Bein's "*Heavenly Express*" is certainly not it. A slender fantasy of death and vagabonds and ghost trains loose on the Santa Fe, the new drama that brings John Garfield back from his Hollywood sojourn proves to be a vague, hollow and curiously aimless work that is neither dramatic nor properly imaginative. Even Mr. Garfield, an actor of force and persuasion, seems far from happy in his Peter Pannish role of a hobo messenger of death and gives the first ineffective performance I have ever seen from him. This is the sort of play that William Saroyan's bitterest detractors think that he writes.

It would be difficult to write about "*Heavenly Express*" without some reference to "*On Borrowed Time*," since both plays are sentimentally concerned with death in some amiable and unexpected guise. In "*On Borrowed Time*," the far from grim reaper was an agreeable gentleman who looked as if he might be selling insurance. Now, in "*Heavenly Express*" he is a prankish and Puck-like young hobo with a gift for song and story, who stalks through the land arranging

for tired old people to get aboard a mystic express train that will take them to the hobo's paradise. In this case, he is concerned with taking along with him a sad old grandmother and a veteran engineer who were kind to vagabonds. In the process of accomplishing his heavenly task, the young messenger of the Eternal Hobo, as the boys put it, causes considerable havoc on the Santa Fe schedule, but the *Heavenly Express* comes through in time.

All of this, I hate to say, makes for a

strangely vague and pointless narrative. It is remarkably lacking in vigor and virility, too. A saga of the hoboes would rightly be sentimental and rather weepy, but it should also be vigorous and a little lusty. "*Heavenly Express*" is never more than occasionally quaint. There is no gusto in it and none of the sort of free, wild poetry that you would have hoped would be a part of it. Instead, you will find a vague and feeble kind of mysticism and the mildest variety of whimsy, thrown together with none of the dramatic power that went into Mr. Bein's excellent previous works, "*Little Old Boy*" and "*Let Freedom Ring*." In neither writing, acting nor direction has "*Heavenly Express*" anything of the proper quality of rich imagination.

Dramatic vigor has always been the most important part of Mr. Garfield's acting equipment, just as it has been the most notable quality of Mr. Bein's writing. But this mystic hobo messenger of death does not seem to be the Garfield type of role, and you will find this excellent young actor, whose departure for Hollywood was one of the theater's considerable losses, indulging in some antic posturing that is most unbecoming to so forthright a player. It seemed to me, too, that the usually admirable Miss Aline MacMahon was far from at her best as the kindly grandmother and that some of the other actors were less than helpful. Best of all, I thought, were the veteran Harry Carey, in his first stage role since 1905, as the engineer; Russell Collins as the sorely tried railroad man who didn't like hoboes; and Harry Bratsburg as a man with his arm in a sling (that is the only way I can describe him). "*Heavenly Express*" proves to be just another disappointment.

# "Morning Star"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, April 17, 1940

## Molly Picon Comes Uptown in 'Morning Star,' a Pleasant Play

"Morning Star," play by Sylvia Regan, presented by George Kondolf at the Longacre Theatre, New York, April 16, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By JOHN CHAPMAN

THE title of "Morning Star," which opened last evening at the Longacre, derives from a saying that the morning star shines brightest after a dark night. Putting it another way, "things might be worse"—and things might be a good deal worse than this likeable play about Jewish life on Broome St.

Sylvia Regan has fashioned, for Molly Picon, Joseph Buloff and a capable company, a drama of what twenty-one years can do to the family of an East Side immigrant woman.

A sketch of the events included—the Triangle shirtwaist factory fire, the World War, gold star mothers and the normal sorrows that beset any tribe over such a period—would make "Morning Star" sound like a tragedy. But there is a simple warmth to the writing and playing which makes it pleasant and heartening.

### But Such Is Life

Miss Picon is Becky Felderman, gentle matriarch of a tribe which includes three

daughters, a son, two sons-in-law and a boarder. She wants them to have all of the happiness her new America can give them. One daughter marries happily—well, happily enough; another dies in the factory fire on the eve of her wedding; the third turns harsh and bitter. The son dies in the war and is buried—Becky is sure of this—in the tomb of the unknown soldier at Arlington.

But the morning star is there. A grandson reaches man's estate—his thirteenth birthday—just as the son did once before. Not all of the family's lives are wrecked, and the faithful boarder still gently woos the patient Becky.

This is a lot to pack into one play in a single act—but the writing is tight, the characterizations are sure and the comedy is human. In order to accomplish everything Miss Regan has to have people popping in and out of a number of doors all the time—but the result is a sort of one-room "American Way," without the parades, the many scenes and the awe at its own stateliness which that drama had.

### Miss Picon's Debut

There is not, perhaps, the lift and inner excitement of "Awake and Sing" in "Morning Star" and its philosophy and method are not new; but it is genuine and likeable.

Miss Picon, making her first appearance in a play in English, plays with reticence and intelligence. Mr. Buloff, as the boarder, is an ingratiating Jewish comedian, broad but not too broad in method. Ruth Yorke, Jeanne Greene, Martin Elaine, David Morris and the others contribute to the family scene, and Harold J. Stone is amusing as a hungry revolutionist.

Charles K. Freeman's direction can be put down as an expert bit of juggling. Howard Bay's East Side living room is an unobtrusive help.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, April 17, 1940

## Molly Picon Appears in "Morning Star"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

MOLLY PICON, long a favorite downtown, made her Broadway debut as a legitimate actress at the Longacre last night, winning new friends and holding old ones, in a "Cavalcade" of family life on Grand Street known as "Morning Star." Sylvia Regan's drama is homespun and unpretentious. As its characters roll none too merrily along from 1910 to 1931, it goes unashamedly about the task of winning tears and laughter. It may be a play that includes everything but the kitchen stove and distinction. Yet, both as written and as acted, it generally achieves its easy, often teary, and always obvious effects.

As an unspectacular "American Way" of the lower East Side, "Morning Star" tells the story of a widowed mother (Miss Picon, of course) who, by her courage, manages to hold her family together during twenty-one long years. Both history and Miss Regan are agreed that the years of Miss Picon's gallant matriarchy were turbulent ones. If great events occur outside the home she rules as Mrs. Felderman, she knows no peace as Mrs. Felderman even in her own home.

### Life of an American

So Mrs. Felderman has a lot of troubles, not she has three daughters (one of them

a grasping monster) and a son to worry about, not to forget her two sons-in-law, a grandson, a radical visitor who goes back to Russia, and a boarder (Joseph Buloff) who finally wins her hand. A fire in a sweatshop robs her of one daughter. The war takes away her son. The married happiness of her remaining daughters is either threatened or ruined. And the depression invades her flat. Still Mrs. Felderman keeps going, and keeps her family going, too, because valiant is the word for Ma Felderman. Although none of the tribulations recorded in "Morning Star" are written with more

depth than one would expect to find in a play taking both its title and philosophy from such a saying as "The morning star always shines brightest after the rain," still Miss Regan's script can claim its good old hokum victories.

If it is all Able and no Irish Rose, it is nonetheless turbulent enough as a chronicle to hold the interest. Often both in its tears and laughter it wins precisely the results at which it unassumingly aims, due to its playing no less than its writing. Its taste may evaporate in such an embarrassing scene as the one in which Mrs. Felderman, after taking a sip or two of her first highball proceeds, as a Gold Star Mother, to tell George Harvey about the Unknown Soldier in Arlington. Or it may include several episodes that are absolute phonies. Still the simplicities of "Morning Star" must be counted among its box-office virtues as surely as they take their place among its artistic faults. At any rate Miss Regan's play makes no bones about being what it is. And that, if you ask me, is a stew of old tricks, skillfully seasoned with deceptive dashes of sincerity.

Mr. Kondolf has cast it well and Mr. Freeman has staged it effectively. Jeanne Greene, Cecilia Evans, and Ruth Yorke acquit themselves nicely as Ma Felderman's daughters. Joseph Buloff plays the boarder who is always proposing with as much unctious and no more subtlety than the part deserves. And Miss Picon, an agreeable actress who knows her business thoroughly, never fails for a moment to give to Ma Felderman all the "Peg o' My Heart"—Maggie Wylie—"The Old Lady Shows Her Medals"—and "America The Beautiful" characteristics abundantly demanded by a script that stops at nothing, and for that very reason often succeeds.

# "Morning Star"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, April 17, 1940

## 'Morning Star,' With Molly Picon, Opens at the Longacre Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

JUST about everything that can happen to people happens to the characters of Sylvia Regan's "Morning Star," which opened last evening at the Longacre. They are swept by laughter and overcome by catastrophe and dramatic climaxes assail them whenever they pause to draw breath. Miss Regan tells half a dozen stories in her play; nobody can accuse her of having saved material for a rainy day. She tells them in higgledy-piggledy fashion, with little order but great warmth.

The play is a chronicle of the Feldermans of Broome street between 1910 and 1931. There was Esther Felderman who was happy and young and was burned to death in the Triangle factory fire on the day before she was to have married. There was Hymie, character of Becky gives it—the character which comes so warmly alive in the hands of Miss Molly Picon, acting for the first time in a full-length English language play and acting with such exquisite skill that the English-speaking stage must never let her go now it has her. Miss Picon can give a great deal of unity to a play, merely by being in it.

The lack of structure does reveal itself, of course. The individual scenes, particularly those of comedy, bubble with life. There is a perception even in the most melodramatic passages—and the death of Esther is the most flagrant melodrama—which robs them of crudity. In a hundred touches, Miss Ra-

gan reveals herself as a writer with a talent for character and feeling for human speech, and with a special feeling for the peculiar qualities of Jewish life. But "Morning Star" would be at least twice the play if it were had also a sense of form. Now it is as shapeless and without direction as—well, as life.

There are other good actors in it with Miss Picon. Joseph Buloff, playing the part of Aaron, is one of them, and makes a rich part richer. Jeanna Greene plays the role of Fanny early and, when the occasion arises, with emotional intensity. There is touching freshness in Cecilia Evans's playing as Esther; Harold J. Stone is an entertaining bystander, full of revolutionary fury and Georgelette Harvey enlivens the last act, which is otherwise a little tepid after the violence of those which precede. The acting of the others is, generally helpful. And "Morning Star" is certainly a play with a lot in it. The mind reels on remembering what a lot, good and not so good.

### 'MORNING STAR'

A play in three acts by Sylvia Regan; staged by Charles K. Freeman; setting by Howard Bay; costumes by Alexander Jones; presented at the Longacre Theater on April 16, 1940, by George Kondolf. The cast:  
Fanny.....Jeanna Greene  
Becky Felderman.....Molly Picon  
Aaron Greenspan.....Joseph Buloff  
Esther.....Cecilia Evans  
Hymie (as a boy).....Kenneth LeRoy  
Harry Engel.....Martin Blaine  
Sadie.....Ruth Yorke  
Irving Tashman.....David Morris  
Benjamin Brownstein.....Harold J. Stone  
Myron Engel.....Henry Sharp  
Hymie (as a young man).....Ross Elliott  
Fanny.....Georgelette Harvey  
Hymie Tashman.....Sidney Lupet

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Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, April 17, 1940

## Molly Picon Outstanding In Morning Star Role

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

MOLLY PICON, who is one of the best character actresses in her field, has come uptown to Broadway and deserted the Yiddish-language theater in which, for years, she has been a highly favored star. It is unfortunate for Miss Picon that she, or her management, saw fit to give her a debut in a play so pointless and so marked by futility as Morning Star, which may best be described as a sort of modern Abie's Irish Rose without the Gaelic atmosphere.

Morning Star undoubtedly gives a faithful picture of Jewish family life. It recounts the adventures of a family living on the lower East Side of New York over a period of some 30 years which are bounded on the one side by the Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire and on the other by the gathering clouds of the second World War. It contains a little of the twisted and sometimes pathetic humor of the race, and it has a great deal of the inherent tragedy of it. There is nothing in it, however, to distinguish it from a hundred or a thousand similar stories.

It is a play which is difficult to describe briefly, because there is no particular conflict in it. Mama Becky, Felderman (Miss Picon) has her share of joy, grief, satisfaction and trouble in raising her large family. The joys are not overwhelming nor are the troubles unbearable. It is an aver-

age, normal life, containing an average, normal amount of excitement.

Sylvia Regan, who wrote the play, attempted at one point to show that life is not altogether a matter of bookkeeping, and that steel-hearted manufacturers, whether of ladies' garments or anything else, will not succeed, but whatever social message she intended to convey was lost somewhere along the road and never came to life again.

The entire first act is devoted, meticulously and faithfully, to creating the atmosphere, to making us acquainted with the Felderman family, to painting in the background of this average—or better than average—group of people. The act ends with the news of the Triangle factory fire in which one of the Felderman daughters was a victim. The second act leaps to the World War years, and the third brings us abruptly to the beginning of the Roosevelt era. Little in the meantime has happened to the Felderman family that could not happen—or has not happened—to nine out of 10 children in such an environment and under such circumstances. In other words, it is a dull story, dully related.

Miss Picon is an able actress, and she plays this negative role for all it is worth, but she has no opportunity for the brand of bright comedy in which she has made her mark. Joseph Buloff, one of the most competent of today's comedians, adds a great deal to the production, and manages to vitalize the play whenever he is on the stage, but even his role is purposeless. The remainder of the cast handle their parts adequately.

Morning Star is a harmless little production, but the best prediction is that it will shine fitfully for a moment and then fade out.



# "Morning Star"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, April 17, 1940

## Molly Picon Acts Her First English-Speaking Part on Broadway in 'Morning Star'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IF THERE were any justice in this corner of the city, Sylvia Regan's "Morning Star," which was acted at the Longacre last evening, ought to get a friendly nod in this column. It is a homely drama about Americanism and family life, with a knack for touching on the disarming simplicities and with its heart in the right place generally. Although Molly Picon, the queen of Second Avenue, has sung her songs around here many times, "Morning Star" gives her her first English-speaking part on Broadway. To coin a phrase, she is a darling.

Another excellent actor has an opportunity in Miss Regan's play to show what he can do with a comic role. Joseph Buloff, who once played a romantic part in "To Quito and Back," is hilariously comic in "Morning Star" and recalls the extraordinarily inventive acting he once introduced into a turkey entitled "Call Me Ziggy," that was put on at the same theatre.

If there were any justice anywhere, that ought to be enough for a good notice in a family newspaper. But still an author can hardly expect to go through an American sequence with a hop, skip and a jump and be regarded as a working dramatist. "Morning Star" begins in 1910 on the lower East Side with a Jewish family that feels humbly

grateful for the freedom of American life. During the course of the evening, Miss Regan marries off two of the girls, loses one of them in the Triangle fire, loses a son in the last war in France and concludes with a scene in 1931, when the second generation bogs down in disillusionment. From bright idealism to worldly cynicism in three easy acts is the story of Miss Regan's play.

Now, weddings, births, deaths, disasters, family celebrations and progress from one generation to another are things of universal importance. They reveal something

fundamental in human life. Since the acting in "Morning Star" is always sincere and occasionally able, many of these scenes are touching. But they come as isolated incidents in the narrative of an extremely hurried and hackneyed play. They are heart throbs rather than integral parts of an organic drama. Over on Second Avenue in the old days, these mechanically contrived dramas used to seem very warming. But at the Longacre "Morning Star" seems like a sweet perversion of the truth about individual human beings. Although the Felderman family ought to have behaved like this from 1910 to 1931, it probably did not. "Morning Star" is sentimentalized generality.

Particularly in the first act Charles K. Freeman has accented the meretriciousness of the writing in his direction—always sounding the note of ecstasy and breathlessness. Those scenes are almost an old-fashioned Valentine. As the loving mother of the family, Miss Picon behaves something like that in the early scenes. Her brightness is chiefly manner in the beginning. But it gets to be deeper than that toward the end of the play; when she has a real crisis to act in the last scene, she meets it with strength and decision.

As a middle-aged sutor, Mr. Buloff plays with broad comedy all the way through. He has an extraordinary instinct for all the parts of it—the rakish cap, the weaving walk, the comic inflection, the swift, dependent gesture. As an old-guard Marxist, Harold J. Stone has some funny lines to speak and gives them a comic earnestness. Most of the parts are made of scraps fitted into a pell-mell narrative. They are acted as well as possible by Jeanne Greene, Martin Blaine, David Morris, Gerorgette Harvey and the others. Howard Ray's East Side setting follows the progress of the family without forgetting its origins. "Morning Star" is offered as a popular play on a worthy theme. But it is all heart and no head, which makes Jack a tiresome fellow.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, April 17, 1940

## Family Portrait

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

CONSIDERABLE keen observation and a nice feeling for character have gone into the writing of "Morning Star." A chronicle of a New York Jewish family from 1910 to 1931, this episodic play by Miss Sylvia Regan looks at its people with a humorous and sympathetic eye and tells of their joys and sorrows with philosophical tolerance. I would gather that the author has a hearty dislike for domineering and embittered Sadie, the unpleasant girl of the Felderman family, but for all the rest of them, whether they be philanderers, weaklings, Bolsheviks or even song-writers she has the kindest understanding. The result is a friendly and likable little play, occasionally a bit too sentimental and gushy for comfort, but of a genuine, if mild, interest almost throughout.

Although done on an intimate, rather than on a spectacular, scale, "Morning Star" is by way of being a local Jewish counterpart of "Cavalcade" and "The American Way." Here is the tale of devoted Becky Felderman, who attempted to bring up her four children to be a credit to their race, their new country and their dead father,

and, despite her tireless virtue, was but intermittently successful at it. The gentlest of the daughters was among the 145 girls burned to death in the Triangle sweatshop fire of 1911. Another of the girls married a shiftless song-writer and had to struggle against his talent for infidelity. The third of the girls became bitter when she lost her sweetheart to the youngest sister and proceeded to make every one's life unhappy. The boy was killed in the first World War.

As you can see, poor Becky Felderman and her children didn't have a great deal of fun or success in life. But Becky was always brave and understanding and she had the valuable assistance of an amiable boarder named Aaron Greenspan, so existence somehow managed to be bearable for her and she never lost her faith or her courage. This chronicle of the family is never intensely dramatic or particularly pointed, but it does manage to be an always credible account of a group of living people, which is something in the theater these days. "Morning Star" has the additional advantage of employing its Americana modestly and unostentatiously and of presenting even its minor portraits with humorous sympathy. Although never a work of any great distinction, it does have its points.

It is attractively played. Miss Molly Picon, the great lady of the local Yiddish stage, makes her debut in a speaking role as the faithful mother and plays with fine modesty and compassion. That excellent comedian, Joseph Buloff, is particularly good as the boarder, playing with characteristic humor and resource. A really interesting player is this Mr. Buloff. The lesser parts are, in almost all cases, effectively played, with Miss Jeanne Greene as the song-writer's wife, Miss Cecilia Evans as the ill-fated youngest daughter, Miss Ruth Yorke as the disagreeable daughter and Harold J. Stone as a comic Bolshevik who finally stands at the right hand of Stally proving particularly successful. Miss Gerorgette Harvey brings her usual distinction to a small third-act role. "Morning Star" has a quality of warmth about it.

# "Medicine Show"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, April 13, 1940

## 'Medicine Show,' a Sober Contribution to A Debate, Opens at the New Yorker

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THE Federal Theater may be dead but its method goes marching on. It marched last evening at the New Yorker Theater, where private enterprise, as represented by Carly Wharton and Martin Gabel, offered a soberly emphatic "Hving newspaper" treatise on socialized medicine called "Medicine Show." It is a good deal more medical than showy, its purpose being to convince rather than to excite.

Oscar Saul and H. R. Hays have arranged their arguments in a logically telling fashion. A statistician addresses the audience, inviting its members to come to the stage and enter through formidable doors into the "medical maze." Selected types rise from the orchestra seats to answer his plea and accept the author's instruction. They are told that 250,000 persons die annually from preventable diseases; that there are too few doctors, paid too little, in free clinics; that not even New York, best hospitalized of American cities, has enough beds to care for the sick who cannot pay. The poor have "twice as much sickness and half as much medical care," they are told, and the terrifying annual loss in suffering and wealth which comes from illness is described in words and figures.

And the dramatic pamphlet which the authors have prepared is illustrated. A child in the country dies of diphtheria because of isolation from medical care and because of poverty. A group of the doomed is gathered. Here is a man dying of pellagra; here a girl of rheumatic fever. This boy is doomed by paresis; this man by undiagnosed cancer. They turn to a young physician but he, unless he is to starve himself, cannot give all his time to

those who are dying and cannot pay. The group of observers tries to find a way out of the maze, for the already doomed and for themselves, the threatened. To them and to the authors, governmental supported health service seems the answer.

The argument is sober and logical; the drama sober and unimaginative. Engrained in theme, the authors have forgotten theatre. In "Medicine Show" there is nothing of that flaring vividness which made "—one-third of a nation—" so much more than a tract. "Medicine Show" is all tract, gaining in emphasis from being read aloud but only as any argument gains from being spoken. It hammers at its point methodically, but few sparks fly. It talks of the human realities behind statistics but is itself almost entirely statistical. Once it turns to fantasy and, although the fantasy limps rather badly, it is only in those few moments that "Medicine

### 'MEDICINE SHOW'

A "living newspaper" in two acts by Oscar Saul and H. R. Hays; directed by Jules Dassin; designed and lighted by Samuel Leve; music by Hanns Eisler. Presented at the New Yorker Theater on April 12, 1940, by Carly Wharton and Martin Gabel. The cast:

|                    |                   |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| Statistician.....  | Martin Gabel      |
| Hall.....          | Coburn Goodwin    |
| Dora.....          | Dorothy McGuire   |
| Mac.....           | John Randolph     |
| Jackson.....       | Philip Bourneuf   |
| Mrs. Jackson.....  | Grace Coppin      |
| Mrs. Sullivan..... | Isabel Bonner     |
| Joe.....           | Harry Lessin      |
| Clinic Doctor..... | J. Richard Jones  |
| Dr. Young.....     | Alfred Ryder      |
| Mrs. Young.....    | Zannah Cunningham |
| Dr. White.....     | Bram Nossen       |
| Kennedy.....       | Richard Clark     |
| Rose.....          | Ode Deering       |
| Quack.....         | Norman Lloyd      |
| Chorines.....      | Linda Lee         |
| Andrew.....        | Virginia Campbell |
| Johnny.....        | Joseph M. Dixon   |
| Dr. Mackenzie..... | Ronald Reiss      |
| Ben.....           | William Hansen    |
| Ellie.....         | Perry Bruskun     |
| John.....          | Sara Floyd        |
| Pete.....          | Melbourne Ford    |
| Sarah.....         | Peter Frye        |
| Marj.....          | Pearl Gaines      |
| Bill.....          | Norma Green       |
| Ell.....           | Leigh Whipper     |

Show" takes on theatrical life. For the rest, its interest is in the dialectics only. The New Yorker's stage is all platform.

The arguments are clearly spoken by Martin Gabel as the statistician, and Dorothy McGuire, Alfred Ryder, John Randolph, Norman Lloyd and Philip Bourneuf are among those who act as much of the script allows. Most of the members of the cast are required merely to listen and nod their heads as the points are made.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, April 13, 1940

## 'Medicine Show' Is a Living Newspaper Survey of the Health Problem in America

By BROOKS ATKINSON

OUT of the dry statistics of facts about health in the United States, Oscar Saul and H. R. Hays have assembled a profoundly impressive dramatic chalk-board talk, "Medicine Show," which was acted at the New Yorker Theatre last evening. It is the first living newspaper play put on since the Federal Theatre passed away. Beginning with grim facts about the 250,000 preventable deaths every year in this country, it develops into an argument for a national health plan. The American Medical Association appears as villain and was roundly hissed by an excited first night audience.

Whether the facts as presented are accurate or not, this theatre-goer has no way of verifying on short notice. But "Medicine Show" is a completely absorbing presentation of a public problem, well staged for the most part and more illuminating than most things the theatre offers. Although it is generally a little presumptuous for a drama reviewer to urge readers to see a specific play, perhaps the occasion is sufficiently unusual to warrant an exception this morning. For "Medicine Show" is original as theatre and vital in its material.

You may just as well close your eyes dur-

ing a brief "Alice-in-Wonderland" interlude in the second act. As fantasy it is intolerably precious. As part of a factual lecture it is an artistic solecism, to say the least. For the whole purpose of "Medicine Show" is to present statistical material bluntly with side-lights on its human significance. The basic situation is this: Every year 250,000 people die in America from lack of medical attendance. On the other hand, young doctors have great difficulty in earning a living. Given the need for medical attendance on the one side, and the ability and willingness to supply it on the other side, some way must be found to bridge the chasm between. As a problem

it is no different from a great many other problems involving distribution and service. In spite of the economic issues involved it is a social problem fundamentally.

Late in the evening "Medicine Show" gets off medical particulars into political generalities. It speaks out sharply against balancing the budget, which is probably something Mr. Saul and Mr. Hays need not worry about right now. For to judge by the passionate applause of the audience the unbalanced budget is a great step forward in this country and must be preserved. For the good of the drama, however, it is hoped that the producers of "Medicine Show" succeed in balancing their budget at the end of the week. The good their play may accomplish will not long be measured by the deficit it creates. That is one of the funny things about show business—no doubt proving that show business is fundamentally unsound.

Put the concluding political argument down as the modern counterpart of old-time flag-waving at the close of a patriotic revue. For most of "Medicine Show" is incontrovertible and far-seeing. The authors have made a trenchant arrangement of their material; and Jules Dassin, who directed it, and Samuel Leve, who designed and lighted the production, have given the facts an emotional impact on the stage. Martin Gabel, who is one of the producers, acts the part of an interpretive statistician with professional detachment—the voice of doom. The cast includes Dorothy McGuire, Coburn Goodwin, Philip Bourneuf, Alfred Ryder, Grace Coppin, John Randolph, Norman Lloyd and many others. In the nature of things, there is not much opportunity for acting in "Medicine Show." Intelligently arranged and presented, the facts are sufficiently dramatic in themselves.

# "Medicine Show"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, April 13, 1940

## Medicine Show Has a Message

Living Newspaper Dramatic Technic Used to Emphasize the Evils of Quackery

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

**T**WO hundred and fifty thousand deaths occur annually in the United States. So many billions of dollars are wasted in the medical field that you'd never believe it. Eight hundred and fifty million dollars a year would make us all healthy. Thirteen hundred counties have no medical facilities at all.

If that sounds rather statistical, don't blame me, but the new living newspaper, Medicine Show, which Carly Wharton and Martin Gabel presented last night at the New Yorker Theatre.

Despite the solemnity with which all these figures were announced by Mr. Gabel who is billed in the production as the Statistician, I am not even sure they are correct, but they will give some idea of what Authors Oscar Saul and H. R. Hayes are trying to dramatize. To my way of thinking, the manifest good intentions with which they embarked upon the task of exposing the American Medical Assn. and of preaching the gospel of collectivized medicine are strangely weakened by the lack of dramatic power in their undertaking. They seem about as confused as the situation they are trying to correct.

### Quack Expose

The formula of the living newspaper, inherited from the late Federal Theatre, is used to emphasize the evils of quackery, lack of physicians in county communities, lack of hospital facilities, high costs of medical attention and the "general failure" of the hospital system. Dramatic episodes are interspersed with solid figures (au-

thenticated, I suppose, by government record) in an endeavor to prove that the poorer people are, the less attention they get and the more they have to pay for that little.

The actual figures, according to Medicine Show, are that the poverty-stricken patient is twice as sick as the rich man, gets half as much treatment and pays twice as much for what he gets.

Of course, that is all very unfair, and there can be no quarrel with right-minded reformers who want to see the situation corrected. But Medicine Show, it seems to me, is not sufficiently powerful propaganda to win friends and influence, people toward the cause.

Martin Gabel, as I said, is the Statistician of the show, and the master of ceremonies. He conducts the event on the stage with a compelling sincerity—like a serious-minded stage manager in Thornton Wilder's Our

Town—and with a minimum of acting. Norman Lloyd, always a vivid and humorous young actor, has the liveliest share of the show, as a quack doctor selling cure-all nostrums to the innocent.

### Many Truths

Dorothy Maguire uses some of her Our Town mannerisms in Medicine Show and I am sorry to say that they seemed a little coy, particularly in an inexcusably bad "fantasy" which the authors chose to inject in the midst of their more serious work, all to no good purpose. The abrupt change from a sort of Egyptian tomb, representing the maze of medical ignorance in which humanity is floundering, into an Alice in Wonderland atmosphere, with a rabbit and a mad hatter, was disconcerting to say the least. It did, however, relieve some of the statistical monotony.

Bram Nosslen, Grace Coppin, Zama Cunningham, Leigh Whipple, John Randolph and Alfred Ryder were of able assistance in delivering the treatise, the Messrs. Nosslen and Ryder being especially effective in one of the duels in which they represented respectively the Brahmins of the Medical Assn. and the radicals.

This is not a criticism of the philosophy of the Medicine Show. There may be many truths in it. But it is a criticism of the authors' failure to turn a highly dramatic problem into anything more than a rather boring illustrated lecture.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, April 13, 1940

## "Medicine Show" Is a Factual Argument for Socialized Medicine

"Medicine Show," social document drama by Oscar Saul and H. R. Hayes, presented by Carly Wharton and Martin Gabel at the New Yorker Theatre, New York, April 12, 1940.

By BURNS MANTLE

**T**HIS "Medicine Show" at the New Yorker Theatre is a refinement of sorts of the living newspaper plays that the Federal Theatre introduced during the relief era. A refinement at least in the quality of its settings and the staging of its message.

It is the same type of entertainment, if entertainment is the word. It is backed by a similar earnestness of purpose and is as completely and authentically documented, as were "Power" and "... one-third of a nation. . ."

Here are facts and figures that should convince you of a great lack in our social democracy so far as our provision for the treatment and healing of the burdened sick are concerned.

And more importantly, in our treatment and neglect of those preventable cases that result in the staggering total of 250,000 deaths a year.

Here you will meet a most persuasive Statistician who will present you with many more statistics than you can possibly absorb in a single evening, even if you are normally a glutton for statistics.

Did you know that the huge city of Chicago supports but a single free hospital?

### Parade of Unfortunates

Here will be paraded before you representatives of all those thousands of ill-nourished unfortunates who collapse under the pressure of trying to take care of themselves. Thus becoming burdens, and costly burdens, too, upon any community that hasn't the foresight to spend dimes to save dollars in the protection of its own howling taxpayers.

Did you know there are 1,600 counties totally without hospital facilities?

The "Medicine Show" theme is that of making socialized medicine a governmental enterprise and hospitalization insurance obligatory.

The hero is a youthful medic who takes his Hippocratic oath seriously and would dedicate his time and his medical learning to the succoring of humanity.

The villain is a certain Medical Association that beats down the young doctor's impulses on the specious plea that such action is unethical and in opposition to the best medical traditions.

Like most propaganda drama "Medicine Show" is more impressive in naming the cure than in rallying support for a cure.

The audience is dismissed with the suggestion that it think matters over and decide to act.

### Audience Reaction

Audiences are not good at thinking. Especially individual thinking. Nor good at acting, either. Audiences take in all that is offered and give out little more than a weak lip-service support or passing observations of regret that such things can be.

### Its Direction a Bit Uncertain

"Medicine Show" has been capably cast. Martin Gabel, co-producer, reads the Statistician's speeches with force and conviction. His associates take their pace and their earnestness from him. Its direction is a bit uncertain.

The pre-view audience with which I sat was visibly impressed and appreciative. In order that the work may appeal to a wide public the top price for seats ranges downward from \$1.65 to 50 cents.

Have you any idea of the millions incapacitated annually by venereal diseases? Of the hundreds of thousands of preventable tubercular and cancer cases that a governmental medical appropriation could save?



# "Medicine Show"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, April 13, 1940

## Socialized Medicine

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THE technique of the Living Newspaper, that vigorous and combative offspring of the late Federal Theater Project, is once more employed to impressive effect in "Medicine Show." This newest issue of the theater's most outspoken journalistic medium is a hard-hitting survey of American health conditions, a heartfelt plea for socialized medicine and an indignant attack on the American Medical Association, done with zest, power and remarkable dramatic effectiveness. A stirringly dramatized stump speech, rather than a play, this angry chronicle by Oscar Saul and H. R. Hays certainly isn't afraid to hit about it with fire and zeal, and it is almost certain to bring forth a furious rebuttal from the more conservative wing of the medical profession. All that a reviewer can say is that it speaks with confidence and conviction and that it is dramatically persuasive.

The manner of presentation is that of such previous Living Newspaper successes as "One-Third of a Nation," "Power" and "Triple A Ploughed Under." In brief and staccato scenes, without recourse to the conventions of a plot, "Medicine Show" presents its case with statistics, caricature, impassioned pleas, a lantern slide or two, considerable invective and many dramatized and apparently factual episodes from the history of its subject. It offers us an ugly picture

of health conditions of today, despite all that has been done in the way of progress; proclaims that things cannot be improved under present conditions and declares that only socialized medicine will protect the physical well-being of the impoverished and undernourished sections of the community. To the cry that socialized medicine would cost too much to be practicable, "Medicine Show" replies sharply that any such cost would be cheaper than the waste due to preventable sickness and disease among the poor.

The chief villain, says "Medicine Show" in no uncertain terms, is the American Medical Association, which stands opposed to the efforts of progressive doctors to or-

ganize and bring co-operative help to those unable to pay for proper medical care. There seems to be little doubt that this biting polemic will bring forth a violent response from those who are attacked, and the evidence is that the editorial department of the Living Newspaper is prepared to meet any such reply with joy and celerity. Certainly no one can deny that "Medicine Show" is in deadly earnest and is filled with a crusading sincerity. It would be difficult, also, to deny that it is almost always theatrically arresting and often even exciting. There is an interpolated parody of "Alice in Wonderland," which is ineffective and clumsily makes the points that the other sections of the work makes far more stirringly, but for the rest of the time the current Living Newspaper is also a good, if disturbing, show.

The production is excellent. The set and the lighting are the work of Samuel Leve, who has accomplished his task admirably while Jules Desain has provided smooth and dynamic direction. Acting in this sort of show presents special problems, for the people in "Medicine Show" are types and personified viewpoints, rather than flesh-and-blood creations. There is, however, good and incisive work in all of the roles, particularly by Martin Gabel as a sort of statistical master of ceremonies; by the attractive Miss Dorothy McGuire as a sort of heroine, and, in lesser parts, by John Randolph, Miss Grace Coppin, Philip Bourneuf, Alfred Ryder, Leigh Whipper and Miss Norma Green. "Medicine Show" is the most controversial theatrical work in town, and its interests are didactic and editorial, rather than dramatic, but it is remarkably effective on the stage. It really does pulsate with life and fury.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, April 13, 1940

## "Medicine Show" Opens At the New Yorker

By JOHN MASON BROWN

ONE of the most interesting contributions of the Federal Theatre was unquestionably that form of dramatized editorial known as The Living Newspaper. "Triple A Plowed Under," "Power," and, most especially, "one-third of a nation" were all of them arresting, and steadily improving examples of the vitality of a technique admirably adapted to propaganda.

If the Living Newspapers were not theatre in the ordinary sense, they were something more than theatre. They refused to limit themselves to pretending that what they offered was the story of one family living by grease-paint convention in a house possessed of only three walls inasmuch as the fourth wall had been removed. They spoke on public questions in terms not of individuals but of large sections of the public. They enjoyed a ubiquity which more commonly is the property of the movies. With the aid of lights, eloquent special pleaders, music, lantern slides, lectures, statistics, allegorical figures, actors dressed as public figures, and scattered scenes they were by intention more like quickening dioramas than like ordinary dramas. With this important difference. They were really pamphlets meant to be heard, not read. They were special pleadings that took skillful and exciting advantage of all the stage's intensifying devices to thunder home their points.

### Socialized Medicine

In their very willingness to overstate the

case as they wanted it stated, and to dispense with complexities in their partisan preachments, no less than in their ability to achieve pulverizing emotional effects, lay their almost terrifying strength.

I mention The Living Newspapers in some detail because, although the Federal Theatre is no longer in existence, "Medicine Show" comes as their latest edition. It has been staged at the New Yorker by private citizens. At least in its highly effective first half, it can boast the same unorthodox skill and the same bludgeoning strength which distinguished the Federal Theatre's most successful issues.

What Oscar Saul and H. R. Hays have written, and what Jules Desain has directed with uncommon felicity and Samuel Leve

has set and designed admirably, is a plea for socialized medicine. If their editorial falters badly in its unfortunate digression into an "Alice in Wonderland" interlude in its second part and if its concluding paragraphs seem bogged down by statistics, the first half of their hospital report is as fascinating as it is appalling.

### Gay Paresis

Its spokesman is a statistician, played with an intelligent and sobering intensity by Martin Gabel. He knows all the awful answers. It is he who leads the "typed" stooges from the audience through an ominous door into the airless room in which the ugly facts of public health in this country imprison them. It is he who keeps insisting that 250,000 preventable deaths occur annually in these United States. It is he who interviews the ten poor people doomed to die for various reasons under existing conditions because they have not money enough to get the medical attention they deserve. It is he, too, who leads an attack against the hide-bound members of the American Medical Association. And he who, through the heart-breaking case histories he sets before us, urges socialized medicine and support of the President's actions in its behalf.

How accurate are this statistician's figures or how fairly he has stated his case against the A. M. A., I, for one, do not know and have no way of knowing. But I do know that as set, directed, and acted by such players as Norman Lloyd and Alfred Ryder the first half of "Medicine Show" is as impressive as a dramatized lecture as it is depressing. The pity is that theatrically the second half fails to live up to the skill previously shown in its championing of a cause for which it has many good things to say. It ceases to be effective theatre, strays into bad fantasy, and ends up as a seminar, however, duly conducted, on a subject still worthy of the attention, even when it has ceased to hold it.

# "Suspect"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, April 10, 1940

## Pauline Lord Comes Home to Play 'Suspect,' Murder Drama

"Suspect," drama by Edward Percy and Reginald Denham. Produced by Douglas MacLean and Arthur J. Beckhard at the Playhouse, New York, April 9, 1940.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

IN the new murder melodrama, "Suspect," at the Playhouse, Pauline Lord plays a possessive mother who may or may not have committed a Lizzie Borden murder thirty years before the play opens and has spent those thirty years fighting the fidgets.

The authors are the Edward Percy and Reginald Denham who also wrote "Ladies in Retirement." They make something of a specialty of crime drama and have a nice feeling for suspense, sweetened with occasional shivers.

They are less successful with "Suspect" than they might have been if their heroine had not had two strikes called on her when the drama starts. It is the authors' chore to keep an audience guessing and there is very little guessing about this lady as Miss Lord has been directed in playing her.

Therefore the game of watching and waiting becomes a little less than absorbing before the concluding scene, which carries an exciting kind of confession.

### Props for Planting

A lady known as Mrs. Smith to the few neighbors she has contacted, is living in obscure retirement on the Cornwall coast. A son in whom her hopes and happiness are centered has become engaged to the daughter of a London doctor.

The doctor comes to visit Mrs. Smith, hoping to learn more of her family's antecedents than he has learned from the son. With him arrives the girl's godfather, Sir Hugo Const, a newspaper publisher, who had been a police reporter in his day.

Sir Hugo is convinced he recalls the face of a dour old maid servant who has always cared for Mrs. Smith, and who was a witness in a famous Wishart murder trial. Leading to the further belief that Mrs. Smith is the former Margaret Wishart.

In that trial Margaret (like Lizzie Borden of Fall River, Mass.) had been accused of butchering a hated father and stepmother with an ax. She was not convicted, but a

puzzled Scotch jury returned a verdict of "not proven," which, as Sir Hugo says, left the unhappy girl suspended between heaven and hell.

The burden of "Suspect" is the persistent pursuit of his clue by Sir Hugo, and the final agreement of Mrs. Smith to tell all. She tells more than all, in fact she makes so good a story by introducing new evidence that her kindly persecutors are completely convinced of her innocence.

This is a manufactured melodrama in which, it seems to me, the hands of the dramatists are too plainly in evidence. Mrs. Smith, as said, bears all the evidences of guilt from her introduction. The sudden and positive conviction of Sir Hugo, after a lapse of thirty years, is obvious theatre. The planting of an ax which may well be the murder ax as a prop of the plot is pretty far-fetched.

There is a sustained interest, as there is even in crude murder mysteries, but there is little or none of that finesse that distinguishes the best of them and has accounted for the success of most of those that have succeeded.

Miss Lord's performance is one of those tremulous exhibits of which she is mistress. She twitches involuntarily, blanches on cue, walks uncertainly, gives way to telling bits of hysteria, swoons with perfect ease and keeps completely in character.

Frederic Worlock is well cast as the inquiring Sir Hugo, and the support includes a splendid actress in Grayce Hampton as the Scotch maid, Wallis Clark, Mary Servoss, Jane Lauren, Barton Haphurn and Robert DeBruce, all recently from the coast.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, April 10, 1940

## Pauline Lord in "Suspect" at the Playhouse

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IF this department were conducting a class in direction, as fortunately for all concerned it is not, the assignment to be chalked up on the blackboard today would be that students really interested in the subject first pay a visit to "Ladies in Retirement" and then drop in to see "Suspect."

Both plays are by Edward Percy and Reginald Denham. Both of them are psychological murder melodramas of the English variety. Both include good actors in their casts. But where, in the staging no less than in the playing, Gilbert Miller's production of "Ladies in Retirement" offers an excellent lesson in how to do full justice to a script, "Suspect," as directed by Arthur J. Beckhard, turns out to be a no less instructive seminar in what not to do.

### Did She Or Didn't She?

No doubt "Ladies in Retirement" is a better melodrama than "Suspect." Yet "Suspect" could unquestionably be made to seem a more suspenseful fable than it now appears to be in the befogged production to which it has been subjected at the Playhouse.

This time Mr. Percy and Mr. Denham do not force us to lament the untimely demise

of a nice old lady who is stuffed in the stove. Or keep us on tenterhooks wondering how long the stuffer can get away with such heartless treatment of the stuffer. The heroine of "Suspect" is a mist-mad woman; a strange, neurotic, anti-social creature; a Scotch Lizzie Borden. Years ago she was tried for the axe murder of her father and her stepmother, and let off (as one apparently can be in Scotland) to live down the ghastly verdict of "Not Proven." The question, supposedly agitating, is whether

or not Mrs. Smith was guilty. And this is a question which arises, after much hack work on the part of the authors, when the boy, introduced as their heroine's son, is meeting his fiancée's relatives, one of whom was a reporter at Mrs. Smith's trial years ago.

Although such a capable actor as Frederic Worlock is playing the inquisitorial and now titled reporter, and such an agreeable performer as Wallis Clark is to be seen as the doctor whose daughter is engaged to Mrs. Smith's son, and not less a person than Pauline Lord is acting Mrs. Smith, "Suspect" never takes on the quality of excitement it might easily claim, in spite of what is manifestly mediocre in its writing.

### Miss Lord's Performance

Miss Lord has her moments. They are slow coming. And she seems painfully uncertain in her initial attack. Still she rises to it when her big scene finally does come around, like a gondola on a ferris-wheel that has been stuck. Her scattered, stilted, intricate playing continues then to be meretricious. When she is crumbling matches absent-mindedly as she hears a tune played just to trick her, or when she begins her cross-examination in her parlor, she exerts at last the spell so uniquely hers.

Throughout the evening, however, the performers no less than the authors suffer because of Mr. Beckhard's direction. His wooden groupings, his confused attempts at emphasis, his unfortunate casting of some of the secondary parts, his awkward stage crosses, his line formations, and his lack of both pace and intensity in "Suspect" do almost as much damage to whatever potential suspense the melodrama claims as Mrs. Smith may have done to her father and her step-mother.

# "Suspect"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, April 10, 1940

## 'Suspect,' With Pauline Lord, Opens at the Playhouse

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

EDWARD PERCY and Reginald Denham are clearly in a conspiracy to give New York theatergoers the creeps, leaving them bereft of peace of mind and apt to start fearfully at shadows. Having already scared almost every one with their "Ladies in Retirement," they came forth last evening with "Suspect," which is likewise concerned with murder, fear and other gloomy subjects. It is pretty shivery, too, in spots. Now and then at the Playhouse you could hear the audience's temperature drop.

Mr. Percy and Mr. Denham are not among those authors who take murder lightly. It is a fearful thing and even in retrospect something to shudder over. In "Suspect" the murder—a matter of axing on a foggy night—is a matter of the distant past. The woman who, as a girl, was tried for the crime and heard a Scottish jury give that cautious Scottish verdict of "not proven" thinks she has lived it down. She's pretty queer, to be sure, and morbidly possessive toward her son and gets jumpy when fog rises, but nobody knows who she is. Or nobody knows until the godfather of her son's fiancée, abetted by the girl's father, grows suspicious. He finds little facts here, tiny hints there, and he puts them together and the best of the play shows him closing his net of suspicion over the struggling woman. Her crime, if she committed it, was a Lizzie Bordenish affair, explicable only in terms of pathology. Father and godfather want to protect the girl from an alliance which may be tainted by insanely murderous heredity.

I suppose you had better not be told whether she is caught or cleverly wriggles through the net or whether the electrifying final scene, so frighteningly played by Pauline Lord, reveals the woman as an innocent victim of circumstances or a person who enjoys chopping others into small pieces. But it is safe to assure you that that scene will make you sit up and take notice—you and your hair. There are other tangles in "Suspect," too, particularly in the second act. It is, to be sure, marred by that lethargy

### 'SUSPECT'

A play in three acts by Edward Percy and Reginald Denham; setting by Ernest Glover; staged by Arthur J. Beckhard and presented by Douglas MacLean and Mr. Beckhard at the Playhouse on April 9, 1940. The cast:

|                                 |                  |
|---------------------------------|------------------|
| Robert Smith.....               | Barton Hepburn   |
| Janet Rendle.....               | Jane Lauby       |
| Goudie MacIntyre.....           | Grace Hampton    |
| Mrs. Smith.....                 | Pauline Lord     |
| Dr. Rendle.....                 | Wallis Clark     |
| The Rev. Alfred Combermere..... | Robert DeBruce   |
| Sir Hugo Const.....             | Frederic Worlock |
| Lady Const.....                 | Mary Servoss     |

which seems part of the method of Mr. Percy and Mr. Denham. The entire first act is desultory and rather half-hearted, and Arthur J. Beckhard's direction does little to knot the authors' loose ends. A good deal of suspense is thus frittered away, there in foggy Cornwall. The play is always spasmodic, and one of moments. But the moments are tingling enough.

Miss Lord's performance is rather spotty, too. That dreamlike quality of hers does little to intensify the early scenes, and then she seems uncertain. But her terror as the net closes is acting to remember and her playing at the end ought to scare anybody stiff. Frederic Worlock is suavely forceful as her chief persecutor. Barton Hepburn and Jane Lauby play quietly and well as the lovers; Grace Hampton is impressively dour as a Scotch servant who knows all and Wallis Clark and Mary Servoss fill in ably. I must be wrong in thinking Robert DeBruce wittingly overplayed a comic vicar, because the audience seemed mightily tickled. It would be nice if Mr. Percy and Mr. Denham would pack the chills tighter in their plays. But even a few chills go a good way.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, April 10, 1940

## Pauline Lord Appears in 'Suspect,' by the Two English Authors of 'Ladies in Retirement'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

SINCE her appearance in "Ethan Frome" six years ago, Pauline Lord has been keeping her own counsel in New York. Last evening she appeared in "Suspect" at the Playhouse. It is another murder play by Edward Percy and Reginald Denham, whose "Ladies in Retirement" has been politely terrifying timid playgoers for the past fortnight just up the street from this office. According to the plot of the current shiver-and-shake discussion, Miss Lord is suspected of an especially bloody murder that occurred as far back as the last European war. As usual, she plays the part with complete personal sincerity and with that soft, pulsing apprehension that has made her our greatest actress in one type of role. Mr. Percy and Mr. Denham are lucky fellows to have Flora Robson and Pauline Lord working for them a quarter of a mile apart. They are luckier than Miss Lord.

"Suspect" was first acted in London in

1937. Apparently it has been brought up to date with a touch of black-out here and a bit of evacuee there. It is the story of a light-lipped lady, known as Mrs. Smith, who lives with her son in a remote corner of Cornwall. Her son has recently become engaged to a girl from another part of

land. The fiancée's godfather is a newspaper publisher. He suspects Mrs. Smith and her maid of having been implicated in a gruesome murder many years ago. Neither the son nor any one in the town has ever known about it. Most of "Suspect" is devoted to a scheme for making Mrs. Smith confess her identity and clear up ambiguous points in the testimony of the almost forgotten trial.

Although "Ladies in Retirement" is written with an unindicted deliberation that seems to chill the blood of most, although not all, adult theatergoers, "Suspect" is transparently contrived. Mr. Percy and Mr. Denham have some difficulty in preparing the ground for the big fainting scene at the end of the second act. The third act is an informal prosecuting scene in Mrs. Smith's drawing room. As mystery drama it is run-of-the-mine stuff, and perhaps a little more egregious than usual in small talk and routine social amenities.

As co-producer, Arthur J. Beckhard has engaged himself as director, and not much to the advantage of the performance. For shape and clarity it cannot compare with the performance of "Ladies in Retirement." Robert DeBruce's prunes-and-prisms acting of the local parson is likely to undermine the clerical profession. Frederic Worlock gives his usual suave performance as the inquisitive publisher, and Grace Hampton plays an ancient maid in workmanlike character style. As the haunted lady of mystery, Miss Lord plays as honestly as though she were inhabiting a masterpiece. But it is a shoddy play, and the sympathy engenders is chiefly for Miss Lord's bad luck as an actress. A person of her eminence deserves a finer play and superior direction.



# "Suspect"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, April 10, 1940

## Suspect Offers a Study in Psychology of Murder

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

WHEN Edward Percy and Reginald Denham gave us, only a few nights ago, such an excellent example of honest melodrama as their first thriller, *Ladies in Retirement*, they established a yardstick by which, perhaps, unfortunately for themselves, all their subsequent crime-plays will be measured. Their new one, called *Suspect*, which was unveiled at The Playhouse last night, falls short of the standard set by the authors themselves.

*Suspect* does have a tremendous, a breath-taking climax. But it requires three acts of rather dull exposition to bring about this one exciting and revealing moment.

Like *Ladies in Retirement*, however, *Suspect* follows a new style in murder mysteries in that it closely studies the psychology of the murderer, and that it is concerned with the criminal's mental or emotional reactions after the deed. Mr. Percy and Mr. Denham are of the opinion that it is the criminal who traps himself, and that detectives are of comparatively little value in determining the blame for the crime. At least that is what they demonstrated, both in *Ladies in Retirement* and in *Suspect*.

In this instance, they are studying the un-

happy life of a Scottish woman who, some 20 years ago, had been tried for murder in Edinburgh. The Scottish courts permit one of three verdicts—guilty, not guilty, or "not proven." The lady in the case is free under a "not proven" verdict, which means that she is suspended somewhere between the comfort of acquittal and the hell of conviction, and she is attempting to hide from the world in a small Cornish town, under an assumed name.

The woman has a son, to whom she is pas-

sionately devoted, and the normal desire of this son to marry brings the mother into contact with the world once more. The secret of her identity is discovered by a journalist who covered the Edinburgh trial, and who happens to be the godfather of the son's intended bride. The third act is devoted to the woman's attempts to prove her innocence, which are so effective that the godfather journalist interposes no objection to the marriage. It would be unfair to reveal the climax.

The Percy-Denham heroine seems to be suffering from a number of complex manias, of which a mother-son fixation is one. She is also afflicted with melancholia, maniac depression and other dangerous forms of insanity. And she lives under two constant fears—the fear of being found out and the fear of losing her son.

I am sorry to say that this makes for considerable dullness and not one-tenth of the drama that we found in *Ladies in Retirement*, although Miss Pauline Lord, in the role of the fearful murderess, did an altogether magnificent job in making the woman real. She merited the uproar that saluted her at the curtain.

Miss Lord's supporting company was not as successful. It seems to me, as the one surrounding Flora Robson in *Ladies in Retirement*, Frederick Worlock, as the journalist, gave a highly competent performance, and Robert DeBruce, as a coroner, has his titivating moments. The character of the son is, of course, a weak one—but it didn't have to be quite as feeble as Barton Hepburn succeeded in making it.

There is really then only one item of real merit in *Suspect*, and that is the splendid performance of Miss Lord, who can pull and haul at your emotions and, in the end, scare you nearly to death with her acting strength. This, however, does not save the play.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, April 10, 1940

## Lady With Ax

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

BEING fond of murderesses, the Messrs. Edward Percy and Reginald Denham, who gave us a fascinating study of one of them in "*Ladies in Retirement*," tell us of another in "*Suspect*." Since the heroine of their new play is Miss Pauline Lord, you may be sure that she is of the wistful and fluttering type, more victim than villain, and that she creates as much sympathy as horror while she demonstrates the writhings of a neurotic mother accused of a double crime. Yet the lady who is in retirement in the newer Percy-Denham work is, unless the other characters in the drama are suspecting her wrongfully, quite a girl assassin in her way, being accused of having slaughtered her father and stepmother with an ax, in the manner of the celebrated Lizzie Borden. Her adventures, it may be added, are moderately interesting upon occasion, particularly in the third act, but never as satisfying as those recounted in "*Ladies in Retirement*."

In "*Suspect*," the crimes have been committed many years before the play opens, which may conceivably destroy some of the interest surrounding them. Here we come upon Miss Lord as an enigmatic lady known as Mrs. Smith, who has been living quietly and rather secretly with her son near the Cornish coast. Probably nothing would have happened to her had not the son taken it

into his head to marry the daughter of a nearby doctor. That, however, brought down upon her the girl's godfather, who was a newspaper publisher and in his youth had covered the trial of an alleged ax-murderess, who had been let off with the dubious verdict of "not proven." Well, the publisher takes a few looks about and decides that Mrs. Smith is the killer, and then sets out to prove it. That attempted demonstration of her guilt, with the mother fighting for her son and perhaps her life, provides the most appetizing portion of the play, but, according to that unwritten law of reviewing, I can't tell you much about it.

It strikes me that the hard-boiled publisher

and his friend, the doctor, turn out to be rather glibly when faced by the cornered Mrs. Smith, but the struggle between the desperate woman and her tormentors is an indisputably interesting one. "*Suspect*" has the misfortune, however, to take quite a long time in getting started, to be forced into lengthy exposition about past events and to lack a certain plausibility. These faults might not seem so important if the play were directed with the guile and expertness that went into the staging of "*Ladies in Retirement*." The truth of the matter is that, despite Miss Lord's excellent work, the new play gives the impression of having been tossed on the stage and left to work out its own destiny there. More expertly done, it might have been an excellent thriller. As presented at the Playhouse, it has its scenes of interest, but seems sprawling and uncertain.

The flaws of "*Suspect*" are by no means the fault of Miss Lord. On the contrary, she is of enormous help to the proceedings, playing the suspected murderess with great sympathy and understanding and yet adding that suggestion of madness and terror that is so vital to the suspense. You can believe in her Mrs. Smith as either slayer or harassed innocent, and she never ceases to present a portrait of honesty and distinction. Miss Grayce Hampton is of assistance as the faithful, protective and slightly sinister maid and companion of the mysterious Mrs. Smith, and Frederic Worlock is helpful as the suspicious newspaper publisher. I think Miss Jane Lauren is properly effective, too, as the son's fiancée, and that Miss Mary Servosa and Wallis Clark help things along pleasantly. It would be exaggerating, though, to say the same thing of Barton Hepburn, who plays the son. "*Suspect*" suffers more from the staging than from the writing.

# "Higher and Higher"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, April 5, 1940

## 'Higher and Higher,' Rodgers and Hart Musical, Opens at the Shubert

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

EVERYTHING is glossy and expert at the Shubert Theater, where "Higher and Higher" opened last evening. Richard Rodgers has written sweet and lively tunes for it; Lorenz Hart has composed lyrics of suitable intricacy and Jack Haley and Sharkey, a trained seal, vie in friendly fashion to provide laughter. Mr. Haley is the more inventive, and doesn't have to be fed fish, but there's a fine simplicity about the way Sharkey goes straight to the point.

To these charms other things are added. Miss Marta Eggert, who has come from Budapest by way of Hollywood to make her debut, out-trills the flute and is charming and vivacious in addition. Miss Shirley Ross, who just comes by way of Hollywood, sings a lament or two with a faraway look in her eyes and appropriate sadness in her voice, and Leif Erickson, who had always seemed to be no more musical than the next actor, also breaks into song. They are frisky and attractive, all these, and so are the girls and boys who dance. Primarily, indeed, "Higher and Higher" is a dancing show and the dancers can all do tricks. In the nimble aggregation which Dwight Deere Wiman has collected a girl who can't turn head over heels in the air is practically bed-fast. The dances are ingeniously contrived and beautifully drilled, and there are some minutes early in the show when they keep things going.

When it gets under way, however, there isn't anything wrong with the plot which

Gladys Hurlbut and Joshua Logan have invented—a perfectly serviceable plot it is, not too intrusive. It is, if you care, about a stratagem contrived by the hundred-odd servants of the Drake family, which is on its uppers. To restore the Drakes to solvency the servants launch a pretty scullery maid as a debutante and get her to indorse things and have ideas about getting her a fine marriage, until she falls in love. It doesn't sound very funny told that way; I have a sneaking suspicion that it isn't even very funny as Miss Hurlbut and Mr. Logan tell it, and that there are stretches when "Higher and Higher" could do with even more comedy than Mr. Haley and Sharkey provide.

But it is so vivacious and expert a show, with so much going on all the time, and

### 'HIGHER AND HIGHER'

A musical comedy in two acts; book by Gladys Hurlbut and Joshua Logan; lyrics by Lorenz Hart; music by Richard Rodgers; settings by Jo Mielziner; costumes by Lucinda Ballard; staged by Joshua Logan; dances by Robert Alton; presented on April 4, 1940, at the Shubert Theater by Dwight Deere Wiman. The cast:

|                  |                   |
|------------------|-------------------|
| Hilda O'Brien    | Eva Condon        |
| Byng             | Robert Chisholm   |
| Dottie           | Billie Worth      |
| Miss Whiffen     | Hilda Spong       |
| Sandy Moore      | Shirley Ross      |
| Zachary Ash      | Jack Haley        |
| Mike O'Brien     | Lee Dixon         |
| Minnie Sorenson  | Marta Eggert      |
| Scullery Maid    | Louise Quevli     |
|                  | Gloria Hope       |
| Three Nursemaids | Hollace Shaw      |
|                  | Jane Richardson   |
| Soda Jerker      | Robert Rounaville |
| Ladies' Maid     | Marie Nash        |
| First Cop        | Robert Shanley    |
| Cops             | Joe Scandur       |
|                  | Richard Moore     |
| Footman          | Carl Trees        |
| Patrick O'Toole  | Leif Erickson     |
| Ellen            | Janet Fox         |
| Truckmen         | Robert Scandur    |
|                  | Joe Scandur       |
| Snorri           | Fin Olsen         |
| Sharkey          | Himself           |

with all the costumes and sets and people so fresh and gay seeming that the story doesn't much matter. Mr. Haley is delightful as he burns holes in his master's trousers; Miss Eggert sings prettily and romps pleasantly and all is as smooth as silk. There is nothing sensational about it that I noticed—always excepting Sharkey—but perhaps there doesn't need to be. It is handsome and professional and the songs are all agreeable, some dreamy and some fit to canter to. And Mr. Wiman has found the people who can canter.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, April 5, 1940

## Jack Haley Renews Broadway Acquaintances In Rodgers and Hart's 'Higher and Higher'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IT seems like old times to see Jack Haley around here again. For the last seven years he has been in Hollywood, getting nothing out of it but a fortune and a reputation. Rodgers and Hart having taken a few days off to write another musical comedy, Mr. Haley put in his appearance in "Higher and Higher" at the Shubert last evening. It is what is known in the trade as a book show, with plot enough to stretch from here to there, a likable cast and some of the most joyous dancing in recent years. For Robert Alton, who stages dancing with extraordinary industry month after month, seems to have no end of ideas for stepping, skipping and whirling and, as every one knows, the boys and girls of the chorus have ingenious feet. With costumes by Lucinda Ballard and settings by Jo Mielziner, "Higher and Higher" may fall a bit short of the highest ranking, but it deserves a comfortable passing grade.

According to the plot, Mr. Haley is butler in a ruined first family. To put the household on its feet, he promotes one of the servant girls to debutante and tries to cash in

on the perquisites. In a character part Mr. Haley is an amusing clown with beaming eyes and astonished eyebrows. What he needs for the riotous buffoonery, however, is a chance to wear a comedian's motley and a scene of complete sky-larking. The book is a proxy structure for half of the evening. But in the second act Mr. Haley, in an old dress coat, begins to let go with spontaneous abandon, fighting for a chance to sing in an over-musical trio and battling ghosts and a

trained seal in a haunted dungeon. He is a very funny fellow when he is on the loose. Give him a chance to bellow or to pick up a dropped cue, and he is in top form. Well on in the evening, he does break through, and he convulses the musicians in the orchestra pit as well as the audience.

Mr. Rodgers and Mr. Hart are in one of their workmanlike moods, treating songs like pieces of music. Since Marta Eggert has a trained voice, they have given her something approaching a jewel song, which should not be encouraged excessively on the musical comedy stage. Not a brilliant score for purposes of gaiety or romance, it is imaginatively varied, and Mr. Hart's lyrics are idiomatically amusing.

The cast is generally well chosen. Miss Eggert's European style is slightly mannered, and does not make much impression on the clangor of an American show. But Shirley Ross's energy and buoyancy keep things rolling brightly. There is quite a lot of normal masculinity in the cast. Lee Dixon is a tall lad with broad shoulders; although he seems to be in robust health, he can dance. Leif Erickson, who represents romance, is no invalid either.

For that matter, all the young fry look wide-awake, and have some use apart from decoration. On the forestage the "Higher and Higher" engineers have built a moving platform which serves as a dancing stage. Mr. Alton uses it for a youths' congress festival. As a whole, "Higher and Higher" is a soundly contrived musical show, fast and loud. But the dancers and Mr. Haley, particularly in the second act, are the only performers who really cut loose. Mr. Haley is a great one for running and bellowing when he is not too enmeshed in a plot.

# "Higher and Higher"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, April 5, 1940

## Sharkey and Jack Haley In "Higher and Higher"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

**S**HARKEY? Do you know who Sharkey is? Well, at any rate he is well worth knowing. Unquestionably he is one of the most gifted members of the family Phocidae. And the Phocidae can be very gifted indeed. Even so, Sharkey is different. After his tardy but still genuine contribution to one brief scene in "Higher and Higher" at the Shubert last night, it is impossible not to have a feeling of affectionate gratitude for him. Come to think of it, it almost seems as if Sharkey must be the Great Seal of the Republic.

He has troublesome habits. No one can deny that. Still one rejoices at his being nosy. Although he may not know his Book of Etiquette, Sharkey's lack of manners can nonetheless put some laughs in a book where laughs are badly needed. The truth is that he and Jack Haley provide Mr. Wiman's new musical with its funniest episode and with one of the most uproarious scenes the winter has disclosed. But when Mr. Haley has to play stooge to a seal, however unconventionally trained, one thing is certain. Something is wrong with the musical comedy in which Mr. Haley is appearing.

### Praising Mr. Haley

For Mr. Haley is an expert comic. He is graceful. He can sing well enough. With his wide-spread, rolling blue eyes; the look of terror that can creep into his face; and the sense he gives of being Caspar Milque-

toast's older son as drawn at college by John Held, he can do his titan's damage to the risibilities.

Yet even a comedian as likable and ludicrous as Mr. Haley needs some help at the grim business of being funny. A seal is all right between fish, so long as he can be kept out of his tank. But even such a superior seal as Sharkey is too long a time leaving the water and becomes hungry too soon after he has thrice flapped his way on and off a dry stage in "Higher and Higher."

Except for Sharkey's indiscreet and very brief prying, Mr. Haley has to work alone at laugh-winning. He tries valiantly as always. Unfortunately, however, Gladys Hurlbut and Joshua Logan have given him little to do that is worth his doing in a dullish

book that is downright soporific in its slow-moving first-half.

### A Disappointing Evening

"Higher and Higher" sounds promising enough. It is what Henry Arthur Jones would have called a lackey's carnival. It deals with a host of servants in a great house who decide to come to their master's financial aid by incorporating themselves to pass a scullery maid off as a Glamour Girl and get her profitably married. It is Mr. Haley's belief in love, as a sentimental love-child, that again and again foils a plot that has already foiled itself.

Although occasionally the script boasts, in addition to Sharkey and Mr. Haley, such a felicitous inclusion as the sentence which describes Yale as being "a period in a man's life between change of voice and selling insurance," the evening is not a happy one. In several uninspired moments the usually reliable Messrs. Rodgers and Hart appear to have dashed off some effortful lyrics and some energetic, though mediocre melodies.

Al Goodman, as always, is dependable in the orchestra pit. Robert Alton has staged some of the more frantic chorus numbers with unquestionable verve. Jo Mielziner has provided some skilful backdrops, even if his treadmill forestage is a bit overworked. And such good people as Lelf Erickson, who adapts himself nicely to musical comedy, Robert Chisholm, Hilda Spong, and Eva Condon are on hand to do what they can. Shirley Ross works industriously throughout the proceedings. And Marta Eggerst plays cute in the accepted manner of so many foreign actresses when asked to be ingenuous, speaks with a heavy accent and indulges in a great many linguistic trills. But the imagination one has come to expect in such of Mr. Wiman's musicals as "I Married An Angel" and "On Your Toes" is grievously missing. So is the entertainment one had hoped for. So for that matter is any explanation of those annoying dancers who stray on and off at one point dressed respectively as a cat, a frog, a gorilla, and what the helpful program insists is a bat.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, April 5, 1940

## Higher and Higher Brings New, Bright Personalities

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

**F**OR any number of reasons, but chiefly for the new and bright personalities it brings to Broadway, Dwight Deere Wiman's new offering, *Higher and Higher*, achieves a position well up in this department's preferred list of musical comedies.

*Higher and Higher* toys carelessly with the Cinderella-like idea of turning a scullery maid into a glamour girl. The chauffeurs that sponsors her hopes to share the profits of her indorsements—cigarettes and champagne, jewels and furs, cosmetics and gowns and stockings. It also hopes to divide the unearned increment accruing from her marriage to a millionaire play boy.

Of course, as you probably have already guessed, she loves a poor man and not the play boy, and the scheme therefore breaks down at its proper place in the second act, and that is all anybody needs to know about the plot.

The various incidents of this pleasant book by Gladys Hurlbut and Joshua Logan, are set down to the music and lyrics of Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, which means that the tunes are gay and rollicking—reminiscent of Rodgers-Hart success over a long period of years—and that if they are not exactly intoxicating, they are at least appropriate and possessed of satisfying rhythm.

Before speaking of the new faces imported

to Broadway, I must say a word for the ensemble and its dancing. Robert Alton is credited with staging the dance numbers, and to me these were just about the most attractive features (set off by the splendid costuming of Lucinda Ballard) of the whole production. The chorus is not only one of the most beautiful on the current stage, but it is one of the most excellently trained. Its tapping is expert and its timing in the more kaleidoscopic patterns is perfect.

Two rolling platforms, bringing the dancers on and carrying them off (and once in a while tripping up unwary stars when they try to take their bows) give novelty to the settings and to some of the dance climaxes.

Chief among the new personalities in *Higher and Higher* is Marta Eggerst, a songbird from Budapest and other towns in the

once-happy Central Empire whose light apparently has been hidden under a Hollywood bushel for the last five years. Surprisingly, for a musical comedy star of this caliber, Miss Eggerst can sing. I wish her enunciation were clearer and that she weren't forced to rely so much on meaningless trills, but even those trills came in handy in the last act, when Jack Haley, the comedian, found occasion to burlesque them in one of the most hilarious scenes of the evening. Miss Eggerst has loveliness and personality.

Mr. Haley, who has been Hollywooding for a considerable time, seven years I believe, returns to give an exhilarating performance of a valet with an inferiority complex. I suspect him of ad libbing on occasion, and if that is so, his ad lib is funnier and more adult than any you have heard reported of the irrepressible John Barrymore.

Lelf Erickson deserts the drama of social significance to return to musical comedy as a great big hero-lover opposite Miss Eggerst, and he gives a virile representation. Good voice, too. More musical comedy stars should profit by his experience, it seems to me, and spend a few years learning to act on the legitimate stage.

Shirley Ross is breezy, competent and pleasant in an ingenue role. But the girl whose dancing and general capability in a minor part attract my loudest applause is one Billie Worth, whose name is not featured. Lee Dixon is another happy figure, built after the gawky but graceful fashion of Buddy Ebsen, and a dancing marvel.

The most hilarious interlude is provided by the exploits of a trained seal answering to the name of Sharkey, who has picked up some astonishing tricks, perhaps from attending burlesque shows too often.

Of the new songs, I liked best *Morning's at Seven*, *Nothing But You*, *Lovely Day for a Murder* and *Every Sunday Afternoon*. Mr. Hart's rhyming, *Florida* and *Horrid* and *Salami* and *Miami*. Miss Hurlbut's gaze. "Yale is a period between the time when a boy's voice changes and he begins selling life insurance."



# "Higher and Higher"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, April 5, 1940

## "Higher and Higher" Adds a Trained Seal to the Ensemble

"Higher and Higher," musical comedy by Gladys Hurlbut and Joshua Logan, lyrics by Lorenz Hart, music by Richard Rodgers. Produced by Dwight Deere Wiman at the Shubert Theatre, New York, April 4, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

I HAVE an idea that the trained seal that bites Jack Haley in "Higher and Higher," and also in the pants, will panic early visitors to the second World's Fair this Summer.

The seal, called Sharkey, being the newest Equity member to join a musical comedy group, was having a great time chasing the goggle-eyed comic about the stage of the Shubert as I slithered up the aisle last night. And the six-sixty opening night customers were practically in stitches.

Even without the seal "Higher and Higher" is a salable musical show. Gladys Hurlbut and Joshua Logan have dirtied up the Cinderella theme a bit by playing a scullery maid as a debutante who gets tight at the Stork Club, but no great harm is done.

There is a new prima donna, too, in Marta Eggert, who is personable and can sing with the best of the larks. Her voice is a flexible and warm soprano and she handles it beautifully.

### From Another World

Miss Eggert was a successful singer and cinema star on the continent some few years ago, the toast of Vienna and all that. She married Jan Kiepura, the Polish tenor, in the early nineteen-thirties and they have

been in Hollywood of recent seasons. Mr. Kiepura appearing in the films and Miss Eggert looking on.

In "Higher and Higher" Miss Eggert is the scullery one who is incorporated as the debutante daughter of an alcoholic bankrupt. It is the scheme of the bankrupt's servants. If they can pass the maid, Minnie, off as a debutante daughter and marry her to a Stork Club playboy they can collect a lot of back wages. Not, as you may see, an inspired story, but one with workable angles.

Minnie loves a singing watchman, and that brings about the first intermission suspense. Then in the last act she gets lost in a haun-

ed wing, which brings in the biting seal. And the laughs.

Dwight Deere Wiman has put his heart and a bankroll into the production. The costumes are lovely, the dance numbers arranged by Robert Alton are striking in their inventiveness and novelty, and the singing and dancing chorus, being one and the same, is an amazing collection of specialty talents.

### Jack Is Back

Mr. Haley is his old bland self, not too coarse to be enjoyed, and funny as a top-flight clown in his favored moments. He does a wild imitation of the Eggert top pokes in a trio, "How's Your Health," that earned him recalls and amused his admirers no end.

Shirley Ross, also a development of the West Coast, is a blonde, pretty and a singer of such songs as go better and better as the night wears on. Especially in a night club. She has had her successes in the West as a band soloist and in pictures, and her Broadway debut is promising.

Tall Lief Erickson is playing the romantic watchman and also revealing a pleasant baritone voice, and another newcomer named Lee Dixon is a dancer of parts.

Mr. Alton's opening number, with a dozen couples breaking through an international waits to offer their specialty bits, is as good as any musical comedy opening that I remember. And particularly serviceable in that it gives the house a chance to be seated before the dialogue is started.

Joshua Logan staged the book. Jo Mielziner contrived the sets and Lucinda Ballard designed the costumes. These are all creditable jobs.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, April 5, 1940

## Servants at Play

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THE program of "Higher and Higher" says that the new Rodgers and Hart musical show "is based on an idea by Irvin Pincus." According to how you look at it, the credit given Mr. Pincus is either a nice compliment or a scornful pointing of finger. My own guess is that it is the latter, because the plan to write a girl-and-music carnival around the institution of the butlers' ball is not exactly a happy one. "Higher and Higher" has Jack Haley, a Rodgers and Hart score, imaginative dances, attractive settings and a wonderful trained seal, all of which are excellent things to find in a musical comedy. Yet despite these valuable assets to entertainment, the book does get so insistently in the way that "Higher and Higher" has a terrible time starting and then limps along between musical numbers. There are a lot of good songs and some pleasant entertainers in the show, but I remain somewhat disappointed.

You know about Mr. Haley, so I had better tell you first about that trained seal. His name is Sharkey, but he should be called the United States Marine Corps. For certainly he comes rushing to the rescue of "Higher and Higher" with valiance and dispatch, just in time to join Mr. Haley in saving the evening. His act consists chiefly of attacking people from the rear, but he is properly heroic about it, as are the actors who are attacked. With Mr. Haley, as a

sentimental valet with an inferiority complex, and Mr. Sharkey, as a seal turned loose in a haunted house, things grow entertaining enough in the second act to atone for much of the plot. That plot tells how the household servants of the Drake family form a corporation to put over one of the maids as a glamour girl and save the family millions. It isn't very satirical and it isn't very funny.

The Rodgers music and the Hart lyrics are, of course, not a great comfort, although this is not, at first hearing, one of their most exciting scores. There is a particularly good song called "Disgustingly Rich," which would deserve to be a hit in any season, and the other numbers are gay, attractive and,

to say the most complimentary thing, characteristic of their authors. There must be a good word, too, for Robert Alton, who stages the dances for all self-respecting musical comedies these days. It seems, and always does a fresh and imaginative job. Mr. Alton gets splendid results from a youthful and attractive chorus, and it would be a pleasure to watch his dance numbers even if they didn't have the added virtue of stopping the plot of the new work. I know that it is regarded as ungracious to speak too harshly of musical comedy books, and I wouldn't be so haughty to the one in "Higher and Higher" save for one reason. It gets terribly in the way.

To get back to Mr. Haley, it must first of all be said that it is a pleasure to see him back again. Hollywood's loss is certainly New York's gain, for there is no more likable and engaging comedian on the musical comedy stage than he, and he does wonders with a not-too-helpful role in "Higher and Higher." I would particularly cheer him for the splendid anti-coloratura work he does in a number with Miss Marta Eggert, who is a nice girl but who will go coloratura on us from time to time. Despite this weakness and a slight suggestion of coyness, Miss Eggert performs pleasantly in the new show. So does Miss Shirley Ross, who has an effective torch song called "It Never Entered My Mind" and in general adds to the good humors of the evening. Lief Erickson, who is new to musical comedy, is the juvenile, and doesn't seem completely comfortable in the role. Lee Dixon aids in the comedy and the dancing. It is always a pleasure to have with us a new score by Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, but I wish it were supported by a more alluring book.

# "An International Incident"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, April 3, 1940

## International Incident Triumph for Miss Barrymore

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THE stage is a remarkable institution. Just a few months ago, Ethel Barrymore was tottering across the boards with a murderous looking fowling piece in her hands and convincing us that she was a canny old Dutch crone of 97. The season before that she was a beldam of 102. Now, in Vincent Sheean's new comedy, *An International Incident*, she wipes away a few penciled wrinkles and becomes a stately yet captivating woman of 40 or so who is still capable of causing a flutter in the romantic heart.

Miss Barrymore's versatility is a constant delight, although by this time it should no longer be a matter of amazement, for she could put on long, white whiskers and play King Lear, if the caprice should seize her, and the performance would be a fascinating one.

Watching her in the new play, which was opened last night at the Ethel Barrymore Theater, one is apt to think only of her pleasant activities on the stage and to forget the play itself. Listening to (and for) the Barrymore vocal modulations, the clarity of diction, the musical tones of her voice, one loses track of the words themselves and, at times, of the thread of Mr. Sheean's play.

While that is all very well for Miss Barrymore—and perhaps for the hundreds of her friends who greeted her so wildly last night—

it is not such a good thing for Mr. Sheean, who is striving valiantly and without appreciable success to deliver a Message to America through his comedy. Unfortunately the star (as has happened before this season) is immeasurably bigger than the message.

Mr. Sheean's message is that America should stay out of the war, and while it is busy staying out of the war, it should turn its thoughts inward upon its own peculiar social maladjustments. Also, Englishmen and English women should stay at home and mind their own business. Also, we should be wary of British bearing debts and propaganda. Also, we should take with some of Mr. Roosevelt's grains of salt the suggestion that the Allies are fighting our battles. Also that England should clean up her own social, political and

economic situation before embarking on any crusade to save the world from Hitler.

The message is couched in the politest and most diplomatic of terms. The propagandist against whom we should beware is Miss Barrymore herself, sweetly enacting the role of a titled English woman (born in Indiana) who has come over to lecture to our women's clubs. One of her distant cousins, a newspaper reporter, opens her eyes and brings about the birth of social consciousness by taking her to a strike region in Detroit where she is hit on the head by a policeman—a conversion that borders on the miraculous, if you ask me. In the process the young newspaperman falls in love with her, but she has sense enough not to marry him. The love interest is somewhat vague, probably by intention.

As a play, it is neither logical nor clearly thought out. It is incoherent, and while one may possibly agree with much that is said, when it is taken phrase by phrase, as a whole it is confused and inconclusive.

For one thing, however, I am exceedingly grateful to Mr. Sheean. His newspapermen, all of them, are not the caricatures that inhabit most of our plays. They are real, alive and true to their calling. Their interviews are as close to the real thing as I have ever seen on the stage. They do not wear hats in the presence of women, nor rob the cigar box, nor cage drinks.

There are other good characters. Mr. Sheean's club woman, headed by that excellent actress, Josephine Hull, run true to form. And the entire cast deserves complimenting for its general ability.

Kent Smith, carrying the difficult burden of making the crusading young reporter believable, accomplishes something of a minor miracle himself. He plays the part with a noteworthy restraint, and it is impossible to detect a false note in his characterization. There is particular strength in his second and third act scenes. Cecil Humphreys is in a far more congenial role than when he was last seen in *A Passenger to Bali*, and while he appears only in the last act, he leaves the stage as one of its dominating figures.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, April 3, 1940

## Lady Lecturer

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

ALTHOUGH he is completely at home amid the hazards of war and revolution, Mr. Vincent Sheean is not comfortable among the perils of the drama. A journalist, autobiographer and contemporary historian of international repute, his debut as a playwright had been looked forward to with great interest by all who are concerned with bringing into the American drama authors of his importance. The bad news this morning, however, must be that the Sheean talents for the stage are still in an embryonic state. His first play, "*An International Incident*," has grace and intelligence in the writing and it possesses the high virtue of providing Miss Ethel Barrymore with a role which permits her to act her age after her recent adventures among the centenarians. It is its misfortune, however, to be hopelessly undramatic in its effects, and it encounters impossible difficulties with the problem of facing its theme. It must be included among the season's disappointments.

In his play Mr. Sheean is telling us of a celebrated lady of American birth who had lived long and successfully among the English and then returned to the United States on a lecture tour. Although the tour had been arranged before the war, she found widespread suspicion that she had come back to the country of her birth to be a propagandist for the country of her adoption. Among those holding to this skeptical viewpoint is a New York reporter, some years

younger than the visitor and a fairly distant cousin of hers, and it is his plan to show her something of the harder realities of life in America, in the hope of convincing her that this country has its own great social problems to solve and must not involve itself too deeply in those of Europe. It is the reporter's—and Mr. Sheean's—belief that members of the upper classes are likely to know little about the actual facts of life in any country, and that they should be made to face them. Well, the lady is hit in the head during a strike riot in Detroit and presumably learns something concerning the world about her.

In telling us this story of the lady's American education, Mr. Sheean has written several attractive and humorous scenes. It is his theory, too, that reporters and club

women look and act the same in all parts of the country, and the appearance of the same actors in these roles in New York and Detroit adds a certain mildly humorous touch to the proceedings. But as a story telling "*An International Incident*" suffers from several serious defects. Its narrative is, for one thing, never really dramatic; it seems, in fact, studiously undramatic. The mild little romantic affair that develops between the lecturing lady and the reporter is never either believable or particularly interesting, and the episode of the involvement with the Detroit strikers fails to seem as pointed as the author had intended. As for Mr. Sheean's editorial beliefs, they are brought out only by speeches of the characters and never, even in the matter of the strike, by genuine drama. Then, as a final criticism, I must say that, having failed to come to dramatic grips with his theme, the author ends by presenting us with a singularly vague conception of his actual message.

As a vehicle for Miss Barrymore "*An International Incident*" has its points. It is pleasant to see the great lady appearing in a straightforward role again. Her recent studies in grotesque crones. She plays humorously, graciously and with all her vast natural charm, and, of course, makes the international celebrity she is playing the person of distinction she is intended to be. It is always a pleasure to have her back with us. Kent Smith plays the hero pleasantly, which is about all that could have been expected in so vague a role. Cecil Humphreys has an effective appearance in the last act as a British public figure, and the recurring reporters throughout the country are credibly played by Arthur Kennedy, Ben Lackland and Sidney Stone. The equally recurring clubwomen are satirized by Miss Josephine Hull, Miss Les Penman and Miss Eda Heinemann. But the results are dissatisfying. Try again, Mr. Sheean.

# "An International Incident"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, April 3, 1940

## 'An International Incident' Opens at the Ethel Barrymore Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

MISS Ethel Barrymore reappeared last evening at the theater named in her honor in a play by Vincent Sheean, under the direction of Guthrie McClintic and among settings designed, one feels for a somewhat larger occasion, by Stewart Chaney. These are all fine names; merely to list them in a sentence is a gratification. They greatly outshine Mr. Sheean's play, "An International Incident," which is only a fitful glimmer, giving hardly light enough to see by.

Mr. Sheean, whose literary activities have been in other fields, is writing about a lady lecturer, come here from England to chat of fox hunting and the like and to bring to the provinces a glimpse of the great world.

A native of Indiana, she has lived long and married often in London, and been famous for her beauty and her salons. Clubwomen flutter about her admiringly. Reporters flock and photographers flash. A distant cousin of the lady's, himself a mere reporter, comes to interview and remains to debate.

He argues that she is, "consciously or unconsciously," indulging in imperialistic propaganda and that she does not know how the other half lives. Enticed by her charm, which is easily trebled by the fact that she is Miss Barrymore, he follows from town to town, still arguing and falling tepidly in love. He conducts her to a strike in Detroit and there a policeman hits her on the head. A little obscurely, as it seems to me, the blow leaves her somewhat socially conscious, but doesn't stop her marrying a member of the British ruling

class when the opportunity next presents itself.

Mr. Sheean writes of these small happenings in that tone of quiet reasonableness which is so ineffective on the stage. The dialogue has a kind of monotonous literacy and it is seldom that even Miss Barrymore can lift proceedings out of their gentle drone. It is slower in the first act, when nothing seems to move except Miss Barrymore's eyes, than it is later, but even at its liveliest the play only intermittently attracts the attention. This may be, of course, because Mr. Sheean is really not writing about anything—because the love affair seems to be carried on through heavy plate glass, and because it is impossible to care whether the lady learns about the non-ruling classes or just goes on about her foxes.

In the first act Miss Barrymore seemed a

### 'AN INTERNATIONAL INCIDENT'

A comedy in three acts by Vincent Sheean; designed by Stewart Chaney; directed by Guthrie McClintic and presented by Mr. McClintic at the Ethel Barrymore Theater on April 2, 1940. The cast:

#### In New York

Smithers ..... Arthur Kennedy  
McClosky ..... Ben Lackland  
Ninette ..... Regina Valdy  
Reggiani ..... Sidney Stone  
Richard S. Bishop  
Photographers ..... Peter Scott  
John Gage

Mrs. John Wuthering Blackett, Josephine Hull

Hank Rogers ..... Kent Smith  
Mrs. Charles Rochester Ethel Barrymore  
Miss Evadne Martin ..... Lea Penman  
Mrs. Thrush ..... Eda Heinemann

#### In Detroit

Mrs. G. Hiram Tracy ..... Josephine Hull  
Mrs. Burlingame ..... Lea Penman  
Mrs. Augustus Schultz ..... Eda Heinemann  
Riley ..... Arthur Kennedy  
Jaeger ..... Sidney Stone  
Witherspoon ..... Ben Lackland  
Richard S. Bishop  
Photographers ..... Peter Scott  
John Gage

The Right Honourable Charles Albert  
Clarke-Bates, C. B., &c. .... Cecil Humphreys

trifle feverish in her effort to bring animation to the poky scene. Later she was her gracious self, maturely handsome and tossing off the author's slight emotions with her left hand. (She isn't anybody's grandmother this time, for a change.) Kent Smith acts with easy gravity and assurance as her younger, admiring cousin; Miss Josephine Hull has a few delightfully characteristic moments; Eda Heinemann adeptly caricatures one of those clubwomen one always hears about and never sees except in plays, and Cecil Humphreys comes in late with a good, salty performance.

But Mr. Sheean's flirtation with the theater is extremely lackadaisical. Mr. McClintic's direction is a bit drowsy, too.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, April 3, 1940

## Ethel Barrymore in "An International Incident"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

AT THE theatre which bears her name Ethel Barrymore appeared last evening under Guthrie McClintic's direction in a comedy known as "An International Incident" which is Vincent Sheean's first play to reach Broadway. Not unnaturally such a combination of talents sends hopes soaring. For Mr. Sheean is one of the ablest journalists of our time; Mr. McClintic is a director-manager in whose debt the contemporary theatre stands for some of its most memorable evenings; and Ethel Barrymore is Ethel Barrymore.

If the yield of so much promise turns out to be a very minor incident indeed, the fault is not Miss Barrymore's. As the much-married lady-lecturer who in Mr. Sheean's script tours this country of her birth as a charming propagandist for the England of her adoption, Miss Barrymore no longer hides her light under a bushel-basket of make-up. Where in "Whiteoaks" and "Farm of Three Echoes" she had her greasepaint fun pretending she was a century plant, she now blooms with all her radiant beauty in her own rights.

### Mr. Sheean and Joshua

She not only looks her loveliest but shows once again how shimmering are her talents

for genteel comedy. Her gifts as an actress by no means stop with such magical endowments as her patrician profile, her lovely head, her far-set eye, her tenderly smiling mouth, the grace of her gestures, the poise of her movements, or the fog-bound lilt of her famous throaty voice. She is also a technician who knows how to make her points while appearing to throw them away. Even when she slurs her speech she can send words dancing through the air with the effortless accuracy of a magician shuffling cards.

Although Miss Barrymore sets about acting "An International Incident" with as much bril-

liance as if she were appearing in "The Constant Wife," she shines like a sun that Mr. Sheean has unfortunately commanded to stand still. His playwriting is becalmed enough to please Joshua but playgoers are more restive.

Mr. Sheean's comedy is the story of how a famous English lady-lecturer has her eyes opened to the realities of industrial life both here and abroad, and comes to understand America's desire to keep out of Europe's troubles when she swings around this country as a supposedly irresistible advocate of the English upper classes, the amiable virtues of which provide her with a subject. Mr. Sheean's play boasts its occasional good lines. It is obviously the work of a cultivated man. It rises, too, to its very rare moments of full-blown entertainment. But no less plainly "An International Incident" is the first work of a man as yet unaccustomed to meeting the theatre's special needs.

### An Unwritten Play

It is a talky affair. It lacks complications that can sustain its all too attenuated action. It repeats itself even as, according to the whim of the production, the club women and reporters encountered by touring lecturers repeat themselves as types in every American city. It suffers, moreover from having its negligible action based upon a romance between the lady lecturer and her much, much younger nephew from Indiana which not only makes belief difficult but is tediously written.

The truth is that, though Kent Smith acts the nephew nicely and Cecil Humphreys is agreeable as the older British official who puts in his last act appearance to win Miss Barrymore's affection, neither they nor Miss Barrymore can hide the disappointing fact that Mr. Sheean's script is all words and no play, and certainly not the comedy either that Miss Barrymore deserves or in which her admirers would delight to see her.



# "An International Incident"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, April 3, 1940

## "An International Incident," Ethel Barrymore Is the Star

"An International Incident," comedy by Vincent Sheean. Produced by Guthrie McClintic at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, New York, April 2, 1940.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

YOU may, being interested, spend a mildly pleasant evening with Ethel Barrymore at the theatre bearing her name in 47th street. In a new comedy with satirical implications, written by Vincent Sheean, called "An International Incident," she is returning from England as a famous novelist engaged for an extensive lecture tour in America, and she will be ever so glad to tell you some of her experiences.

They are not very stimulating experiences, either factually or romantically. She meets practically the same people in every city. The same newspaper reporters and photographers. The same local committee of celebrity hunters bent on entertaining her.

Of course these sample citizens can be just as uninteresting in the theatre as they can be out of it. This being Mr. Sheean's first play, he probably did not realize how important that is in a play. But it seems to me Guthrie McClintic, the producer, might have warned him.

### Hard Labor

Mr. McClintic knows that it is practically impossible to write interesting plays about uninteresting people. And no matter how beloved a star may be, she cannot carry the

entire burden of an evening's entertainment alone.

Miss Barrymore, in marvelous form, does her alert best for Mrs. Charles Rochester, the lady lecturer. She arrives, meets the reporters, deftly parries q's and a's with them and leaves them wondering just what her mission may be.

With one of the press men, Hank Rogers, a mild radical and a second cousin once removed, she becomes interested through the memories he brings of an Indiana uncle with whom she once was in love.

Hank is suspicious of his distinguished rela-

tive. He fears she is concealing a subtle line of propaganda that may have an effect in involving America in the war. During his investigations he becomes mildly infatuated with Mrs. R. He follows her to Chicago and then to Detroit.

In Detroit, hoping to convince her of the justice of the workingman's cause, he takes her to a picket line in strike territory. She interferes with a brutal strikebreaker and gets knocked on the head by a policeman.

### A Liberal Is Born

This experience serves to modify her interest in lecturing, though it increases her interest in Mr. Roosevelt's ill-housed, ill-fed and ill-clothed third of the nation. She thinks she may return to England and work for the anti-imperialists.

A mildly pleasant evening, as said. It is nice to have Miss Barrymore back playing her age and not looking it. She is mistress of comedy lines when she can get them.

The cast is able. Kent Smith plays the enamored reporter with stolid devotion to the actor's job, but no suggestion of enthusiasm. Cecil Humphreys lifts a brief last act scene above the evening level.

Josephine Hull, Lea Penman and Eda Heineman faithfully represent the duller type of committee receptionists. And there are six or seven reporters and photographers that do not caricature their calling.

"An International Incident" should serve as a setup in Mr. Sheean's experience as a dramatist. I have a feeling he will yet have something to say in the theatre.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, April 3, 1940

## Ethel Barrymore in Vincent Sheean's First Drama, 'An International Incident'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

HAVING the instincts of a gentleman, Vincent Sheean has put Ethel Barrymore in a suitable part in his first play, "An International Incident," which was acted—of all places!—at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre last evening. During the last year or two she has been shuffling about as preternatural old crones, which were on the whole amusing. But Mr. Sheean has put her back in the gowns of a lady of quality and made use of her manners and breeding in a part that she considerably adorns. No doubt that is service enough for any drama to perform—particularly by a man who is writing his first play. But this column confesses that it has been expecting something more conclusive than "An International Incident" from the able author of "Personal History" and "Not Peace but a Sword." Mr. Sheean's play is thin and trifling.

It promises well at the opening. In a hotel room in New York a noted lady of middle years from England is meeting the gentlemen of the press as the usual preliminary to a national lecture tour. Although the boys are normally suspicious, there will be no British propaganda in her lectures, she says. Just gossip and stories about her friends in the ruling class. Among the reporters, the most argumentative turns out to be a distant cousin from

the town where she was born in Indiana. At first he is her counselor. Being scornful of her knowledge of modern life and the social significance of the current war, he tries to enlarge her point of view. But presently he falls in love with her, and spends the rest of the play following her around the country.

As an old newspaper man himself, Mr. Sheean writes about reporters with a genial familiarity uncommon on the stage. All through the play, in fact, he writes with an easy, light humor. The lady from England speaks extremely well. Her American cousin is also neatly characterized. Without ever

falling into a glib style, Mr. Sheean can also satirize committee women waiting on celebrated lecturers, and he is dryly ironic about the comfortable assumptions of the British upper class. As a prose writer for the stage Mr. Sheean is altogether superior.

But what makes "An International Incident" unpersuasive in the theatre is Mr. Sheean's difficulty in marrying love to social thought and his casual way with his program for enlightenment. For you must know that the American cousin wants to enlarge the lady lecturer's viewpoint by letting her visit a strike in Detroit. Sometime between the scenes of the second act she does visit the strike, gets smacked on the conk by a capitalistic policeman and thus becomes an international incident. According to Mr. Sheean, this does knock a little sense into her fair head. But all we see of it in the theatre is a dainty bandage on Miss Barrymore's handsome head. Mr. Sheean's chit-chat style of writing about his decisive episode leaves his play undernourished. As far as social thinking is concerned, it is learning without tears.

As director Mr. McClintic has blessed the play with one of his silken performances and luxurious productions. You can regard the whole incident as a triumph for Miss Barrymore. As the lady lecturer she is all charm and radiance, gracing the part with nods and becks and wreathed smiles. Kent Smith also gives an excellent performance as the journalistic cousin. Josephine Hull bobs brightly through the part of a committee woman, and Cecil Humphreys is properly cordial and deferential as a high-born Britisher. Every one acts well inside Stewart Chaney's costly settings, and trivialities flow along lightly all evening, but at least one member of the audience feels that even with Miss Barrymore's stunning presence, Mr. Sheean has not succeeded in making a statement. Is it that easy to convert a member of the upper classes? Not a rude word is spoken all evening.

# "King Richard II"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, April 2, 1940

## 'King Richard II,' With Maurice Evans, Returns to the St. James

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

MAURICE EVANS brought his production of "King Richard II" back to town last evening, lodging it in the St. James Theater, where it was first housed more than three years ago. And since it is a good deal changed in detail, we should probably sit down now to one of those thorough-going comparisons which prove that reviewers have long memories and presuppose that the patience of readers is similarly protracted. But perhaps the will may be taken for the deed.

What matters more is that a lusty play is back, brilliantly and eventfully acted in the central role, and full of movement and invention and the clash of arms.

Martial music fills the St. James again. The scheming Bolingbroke confronts the vehement Mowbray and gaudlets fill the air. The panoply of knighthood and the bright raiment of the late fifteenth century gladden the eye; fine words are spoken in resounding voices. The stage swarms with violent life and the love of melodrama is gratified by violent deeds. In the center, unshrunk by the passage of time and unwearied by the trials of the road tour, is Mr. Evans' individual, fully created Richard.

The little king of Shakespeare, so petulant and so foolish, so intelligent and so proud, goes his exciting, moving way to defeat and death, wasting his majesty in pathetic folly and flinging his rightness and his eloquent courage in the face of the unbending Bolingbroke. It is all very exciting to see, and I envy those who, during this limited engagement, can see it for the first time. Mr. Evans, his director, Margaret Webster, and

William Shakespeare know how to make the theater stirring.

Possibly the present company is not as uniformly excellent as was the first, although John Barclay's resonant and commanding Gaunt seems to me even better than was Augustin Duncan's. Donald Randolph's Bolingbroke very nearly as impressive as was Ian Keith's, and Franz Bendtsen's York not so annoyingly ridiculous as was his predecessor's. But some of the lesser roles are played in a more routine fashion now and Miss Carmen Mathews is not particularly successful in the important, and no doubt difficult, role of Richard's queen. Mr. Evans' own performance is, of course, the essential thing and he approaches the role with the same freshness and enthusiasm. Having already fully delineated the character, he has little to add. But he has lost nothing; his is flexible, beautifully modulated playing.

### 'KING RICHARD II'

Shakespeare's historical play, arranged in seventeen scenes and three acts; staged by Margaret Webster; costumes and scenery by David Folkess; incidental music by Herbert Menges; revived at the St. James Theater by Maurice Evans on April 1, 1940. The cast:

|                                       |                   |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| King Richard II.....                  | Maurice Evans     |
| John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster..... | John Barclay      |
| Edmund of Langley, Duke of York.....  | Franz Bendtsen    |
| Henry, surnamed Bolingbroke.....      | Donald Randolph   |
| Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk.....  | Sydney Smith      |
| Duke of Aumerle.....                  | Lauren Gilbert    |
| Bushy.....                            | Kurt Richards     |
| Bagot.....                            | Everett Ripley    |
| Green.....                            | Alexander Scourby |
| Earl of Northumberland.....           | Charles Dalton    |
| Lord Willoughby.....                  | Anthony Ross      |
| The Lord Marshal.....                 | Rhys Williams     |
| Mowbray's Herald.....                 | Walter Williams   |
| Bolingbroke's Herald.....             | Alfred Paschall   |
| Henry Percy, surnamed Hotspur.....    | Emmett Rogers     |
| Earl of Salisbury.....                | Howard Wierum     |
| Captain of a Band of Welshmen.....    | Rhys Williams     |
| Bishop of Carlisle.....               | Donald Cameron    |
| Sir Stephen Scroop.....               | Sydney Smith      |
| Gardener.....                         | Rhys Williams     |
| Second Gardener.....                  | John McQuade      |
| Earl of Surrey.....                   | Alfred Paschall   |
| Sir Pierce of Exton.....              | Alexander Scourby |
| Servant to Exton.....                 | John McQuade      |
| A Groom.....                          | Donald Cameron    |
| A Keeper.....                         | Anthony Ross      |
| Queen to Richard.....                 | Carmen Mathews    |
| Duchess of Gloucester.....            | Jackson Perkins   |
| Ladies attending.....                 | Izetta Jewel      |
| on Queen.....                         | Jackson Perkins   |

You will want to see "King Richard II" for the first time if possible, but if it isn't with the assurance that the third time can seem very like the first.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, April 2, 1940

## Death of Kings

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

AGAIN Maurice Evans brings his "King Richard II" back to us and shows it in all its rich and glowing eloquence. There can be no doubt by now that it is one of the great productions of the modern theater, worthy to stand in the company of that other classic Shakespearean presentation, the Evans uncut "Hamlet." Because "King Richard II" is, through the infrequency of its appearance, a fresher and more unfamiliar work than the most famous of all dramas, it seems at times even a more stirring offering in the theater than its greatly celebrated fellow tragedy. Certainly Mr. Evans is never finer than in the bitterly moving scene of the hapless King's return from Ireland, and, throughout the course of the play, he is one of the most brilliant amalgamations of the poetry and the drama of Shakespeare that the American stage has known.

Even now that it is growing increasingly familiar to us in the theater, "King Richard II" remains so beautiful a play that it is strange to note how rarely it has been done in the past. Its tragic hero is assuredly one of the most moving of Shakespeare's characters, a sort of younger cousin to Hamlet, a bitter, brooding prince with a greater capacity for thought and motion than for action, a man greater in his defeat than in

his triumphs. A shallow and feeble ruler, he grows with his sorrows, reveling in them and yet being purged by them. A royal eulogist, obviously fond of the eloquence of his own words, he is so magnificent about it that he turns self-pity into great tragic dignity and seems, instead of a pitiable weakling, a man who develops genuine stature through the force of his unrestrained bitterness.

There is no doubt something un-English about King Richard, which is probably one reason why some of the greatest patriotic speeches in English dramatic literature are

given to his foes. At least there is nothing about him of the great British tradition of the stiff upper lip. When he is unhappy and filled with a sense of his own impending doom, he cries out in all of the tragic bitterness of his soul to all who will hear him, and he has no sense of shame at his inability to keep stern and strong and silent about his sorrows. And as a result of his cries of protest against his fate he becomes, not a contemptible creature, but a worthy figure of tragedy; he who was the least capable and many of rulers. Mr. Evans realizes that Richard relished, as well as hated, his own bitterness of soul, and he plays him with something of that relish. The result is a performance of true distinction.

Although the production and Miss Margaret Webster's direction result in a colorful and stirring presentation worthy of the Evans characterization, I have a feeling that some of the supporting performances are not as skillful as they were when we first saw Mr. Evans in the role. I think, for example, that Donald Randolph lacks something of the fire and ruthlessness that Ian Keith brought to the part of Bolingbroke, and that John Barclay who was so fine as the ghost in "Hamlet," is less effective as old John of Gaunt. Miss Carmen Mathews is not as moving as she might have been as the sad queen, and Franz Bendtsen's doddering Duke of York is not always properly impressive in its presentation of a leader in his dotage. In fact, it seemed to me that the best work in the lesser roles is offered by Sydney Smith who is properly eloquent as the Duke of Norfolk. Anyway, Mr. Evans's Richard remains something to see.

# "King Richard II"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, April 2, 1940

## Maurice Evans Returns for a Limited Engagement in Shakespeare's 'King Richard II'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ALTHOUGH Mr. Evans has given us "King Richard II" three times since February, 1937, it is far from being an old story yet. For as he and his company played it at the St. James last evening it seemed again like one of the most absorbing of Shakespeare's plays. Since he played Richard here the last time about two and a half years ago Mr. Evans has twice played the full length "Hamlet," which is a much busier drama, concluding with deaths enough to satisfy the most lethal theatregoer for a month. But, thanks largely to Margaret Webster's bustling and forthright direction, "King Richard II" also seems fraught with circumstances of high importance. When the curtain descended toward 11:30 you feel that something vital has been accomplished. There is nothing parsimonious about this Shakespeare play.

The impression of great labors may be due in part to the effort with which Mr. Evans is speaking his lines. His voice is always afloat in comparison with the abundance of Shakespearean verse, and he has been using it strenuously for a long time now. On a stage which is not acoustically ideal he has frequently to speak at the top of his compass, and the tone is not always pleasant in the scenes of aroused emotion. But Richard is an excellent part for him. Again he is playing it with superb intelligence, tracing the whole fateful career from supercilious complacency to desperate grief. Richard is no heroic monarch. But Mr. Evans knows both the manner and the source of his weaknesses.

He pokes under the pathos of the character to the desolation of a man of intelligence who lacks the authority of a ruler and knows it. Mr. Evans' performance is alert, simple, clearly detailed and remarkably illuminating, and it has fetched an obscure character out of the Shakespeares books and made it one of the experiences of theatre-going today.

The most notable change in the current revival is the Bolingbroke of Donald Randolph. In the last revival he played Mowbray; he was Horatio in "Hamlet." His Bolingbroke is not only his best work to date, but the best acting this part has had in New York. Forceful and sincerely excited, it more than justifies Mr. Evans' confidence in his ability. Sydney Smith, who played a minor character in the last revival, plays an excellent Mowbray in this. John Barclay's ancient, smouldering John of Gaunt turns his dying admonition into a thoroughly dramatic event. Rhys Williams plays the part of the gardener with substance and affection. Although Carmen Mathews' queen is a little at loose ends in the early scenes, she rises well to the womanly protest and grief of the episode in which Richard takes leave of her.

But the chief point is that this is a rousing performance of an absorbing drama. It is full of movement. The attack is driving. Some of the best scenes are played on a forestage where acting can be most enjoyed. David Ffolkes, the young designer, is now Trooper Ffolkes, No. 327,083 of the Royal Scots Greys. While he is faithfully doing martial duty for England, it ought to give him pleasure to know that his artistic duties for Shakespeare are widely appreciated across the sea. His costumes, particularly for Richard, are brief chronicles of the drama and integral parts of a profoundly engrossing evening in the theatre.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, April 2, 1940

## Evans Gets Ovation on Return

Gives Clarity to Role of Richard II

AFTER a tour of the American provinces and a well-deserved vacation Maurice Evans has returned with his illustrious troupe to the St. James Theater in that triumphant performance of King Richard II. The reception, measured in seismograph vibrations, was a whit less boisterous than the first time Mr. Evans presented Richard II here. Merely a whit less. Not that the enthusiasm had abated. There were no signs of that. For the ovation last night was impressive.

Last night's auspicious occasion at the St. James, naturally, allows for scant news of the production. Margaret Webster's brilliant direction of this, one of the least played of the Shakespeare tragedies, still is visible in every moment of the play, and Mr. Evans' characterization is not merely a demonstration of a piece of forceful acting but a notable feat of giving clarity to a role which, at best, seems rather hazy in library perusal.

The long junket from which King Richard II returned does not seem to have marred the production with that "second-hand" appearance which blights so many returning prodigals from the road. The unobtrusive scenery appears as fresh as the proverbial daisy, the musical flourishes suit Miss Webster's neat, orderly style of direction and the costumes, apart from their authenticity, don't look as if they had been in almost constant use for several years.

But the main triumph in King Richard II belongs to Mr. Evans, who portrays that hapless ruler with an understanding born of keen and sympathetic study of one of Shakespeare's most elusive and tragic characters. Unintimidated by the high notes, he plays the sad figure fortissimo when the occasion requires, pulling out all stops in the emotional sequences, and he imbues other moments with quiet subtlety. The mere resonance of Mr. Evans' voice was sufficient last evening to cast at least part of the audience into the ecstatic mood of appreciation, for he can make the words sing out with a meaningfulness that is not usually accorded them.

King Richard II's return engagement is made more newsworthy by several newcomers to the principal roles in the play. Now the part of Bolingbroke is being filled by Donald Randolph, a formidable-looking gentleman with a formidable voice and appearance who does not belie a part that hovers dominantly over the drama. As the Queen, Carmen Mathews is as pathetic a regal creature as you would expect in the depiction, and John Barclay gives to the part of old John of Gaunt the dignity that befits the part. And so down the line. For in reviving Shakespeare it is hardly news by now that Mr. Evans and Miss Webster are a thorough pair, casting the play to a degree representing pluperfection.

The current engagement does not promise to be on Broadway for a considerable time. The billboards threaten that the engagement will run through April 27. If the dates ahead are not too rigidly booked, perhaps Mr. Evans can be persuaded to tarry here beyond the scheduled concluding day.

G. R.

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# "King Richard II"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, April 2, 1940

## Maurice Evans Revives 'Richard II' And Repeats His Earlier Triumph

"King Richard II," tragedy by William Shakespeare. Revived by Maurice Evans at the St. James Theatre, New York, April 1, 1940.

★ ★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THREE years has not dimmed the lustre of Maurice Evans' revival of "King Richard II." It is still the most exciting Shakespearean production this generation has known, and, to me, the most eloquent.

Which naturally brings it now into close comparison with the entirety "Hamlet," since that has been the Evans triumph of the last two years.

And still the statement stands, so far as this department is concerned. There are not many great Hamlets, but there are a few. Mostly resident in England. It happens that there is only one great Richard, so far as this public is aware. And Maurice Evans is that Richard.

It happens, too, that while "Hamlet" will remain the master drama of all time for English-speaking people, its very familiarity and the grandeur that has made it great have lessened the excitement of its production. And these are excitements "King Richard II" commands by reason of its very freshness.

"Hamlet" is the study of a melancholy Prince avenging the foul murder of his kingly father. "King Richard II" is the study of a weakling King become pathetic and appealing through his weaknesses and made eloquent through a poet's gift of eloquence.

The Evans Hamlet is that of a sturdy youth made strong through the justice of his cause. His Richard II is a sometimes frail youth struggling as valiantly as Nature per-

mits to equal the stature of manhood he feels one nobly born should command.

There have been many Hamlets. We have had him played by young men and old, by fat men and lean, by great actors and small.

There is but one type true to the legend of the second Richard, this foppish son of York, who laughed at his nobles and made merry with a court of effeminate yea-men.

### Newcomers

Without sacrifice of dignity or kingly prerogative the Evans Richard suggests all that the butterfly king may have been, yet pleads for him with such eloquence as holds an audience coughless, if not breathless, and sets its cheering his achievement.

The company this season is changed in some important particulars. The Bolingbroke of Ian Keith, to which I, for one, had been looking forward, was not present. In his place was an eager young actor of no Broadway fame named Donald Randolph. And after five minutes of Randolph there was no thought of Keith left to depress the evening. Here is a second Bolingbroke, young and spirited and a fine reader: a match for Richard, and such a Bolingbroke as might easily have stirred a country to rebellion in his interests. It was a triumphant evening for Donald Randolph, as well as for his star.

### Helpful Aids

The new queen is Carmen Mathews, also an attractive child and an earnest actress. If she was a bit indistinct of speech occasionally, the importance of her assignment can easily account for that.

There is a new John of Gaunt in John Barclay, and here again is something gained in the force and moving pathos of the death scene of the defiant old warrior as Actor Barclay reads him.

A new Mowbray, too, and another excellent reading, both in the delivery and the spirit of Sydney Smith, who played him. And Franz Bendtsen seems a happy choice for the aging York.

Charles Dalton is still the stalwart Northumberland. Rhys Williams is dutifully playing the Gardener, and a couple of other Welshmen, with excellent results. In fact there are no weak links in this actor chain.

The Margaret Webster production again impresses by its directness and clarity. The use of the forestage no longer bothers us, and the enthusiasm of the audience helps to make this "King Richard II" an inspiring theatre experience.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, April 2, 1940

## Maurice Evans Returns To Revive "Richard II"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

MR. EVANS' Richard remains one of the most notable performances of our time. Memorable as it was when first he acted it here three years ago; his playing of Shakespeare's weakling king is even more memorable in the revival which opened at the St. James last evening. The main outlines of Mr. Evans' characterization continue fortunately to be much the same. With uncanny skill he follows the text's demands in contrasting in his Richard the arrogance and weakness of the man; his mingled cruelty and tenderness; his immense verbal courage and his sad lack of will; his smirking foppiness and his noble belief in the divinity of his high office.

Yet excellent as Mr. Evans has hitherto been in the part, his performance has deepened through the years. Without losing any of its first excitements, his characterization has gained in the high virtues of its revelations. Although it is as brilliantly merciless as it ever was in laying bare the frailties of an impetuous monarch, unsuited by temperament for the throne, Mr. Evans' Richard

has achieved new depths as a tragic figure.

### A Superb Revival

There is no contemporary actor New York has seen who is blessed with a voice that can equal Mr. Evans' in its melody. He knows that poetry is a song in which words can take the place of notes. When confronted with Shakespeare's music he is not embar-

assed. He does not try to hush the verse into prose by denying its song or mutilating its cadences. He has the lungs, the throat, and the head with which to release the full-blown glories of the text. And release them he does so that no one can fail to rejoice in the magic of Shakespeare's scoring.

But the fine thing about Mr. Evans is that though he grants the verse its music, he also gives it its sense. His eye for character is as keen as his ear for melody is true. He is no mere reciter. He is an actor astonishingly skilled in ferreting out his own interpretation of a text and in justifying that interpretation by the values established in his playing. His thinking never loses its way in sound. Truly, his is an extraordinary gift for keeping crystal clear the intricacies of an involved Shakespearean speech. It is in the wonder of his readings that Mr. Evans' performance has grown. And "Richard II" needless to say, is a drama abounding in speeches of surpassing loveliness which are superbly suited to Mr. Evans' unique gifts.

Mr. Evans' present revival once again benefits by Margaret Webster's ever-vitalizing direction; by the colorful pageantry of Mr. Froikes' settings and costumes; and by the spirited incidental music of Mr. Menges. It is a production of uncommon sweep and excitement. And its fine effects are admirably sustained by Donald Randolph's capable Bolingbroke, by Sydney Smith's excellent Mowbray, by Carmen Mathews' touching playing of the Queen, by Franz Bendtsen's effective York, John Barclay's reasonably satisfactory John of Gaunt, and the general excellence of a large cast.

# "The Scene of the Crime"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, March 29, 1940

## "The Scene of the Crime" At the Fulton Theatre

By WILLELLA WALDORF

FRANK GOULD, whose tragedy, "The Scene of the Crime," opened last night at the Fulton Theatre, is considering the case of David Hanley, a young man who gets into bad company, joins in a "stick-up," and shoots when the victim resists. The scene of the crime, as the author sees it, is the middle-class flat occupied by the young man's father, mother, brothers and sisters. The Hanleys suffer for David's crime as much as he does, perhaps more, for they must go on trying to live down the fact that one of them has committed a murder, been tried, convicted, and eventually, electrocuted for his deed.

All that Mr. Gould has to say in his play is agonizingly, depressingly, true, and if every boy who stands a chance of falling into "bad company" and getting smart ideas about easy money could be exposed to it, probably there would be a definite reaction in the police stations of the country. Unfortunately, the audience which is likely to see the play at the Fulton is not that sort of audience, and as a drama for the general theatre-going public, it is merely depressing, occasionally harrowing but mostly rather dull.

The Hanleys are first presented as ordinary, simple, unexciting people, so undistinguished, in fact, that it is difficult to work up much interest in them. Then David commits his crime, the Hanleys learn what it is to have a murderer in the family, and the second act is devoted to the last moments before David's electrocution, waiting for the hoped-for reprieve from the governor that never comes.

In the third act, the author brings David

back as a ghost to see what havoc he has wrought in his own home, it being Mr. Gould's notion that this is a murderer's purgatory—to see what he has done to those who loved him. He is finally forced to stand helplessly by while his father and mother turn on the gas.

The truth of what it has to say is evident, but the play is less affecting than might be supposed because its pace is generally wearisome and most of the points are overpressed. Although the Hanleys are obviously designed to represent ordinary, middle-class people, there are times when some of them seem too forbearing for comfort, and the dialogue is not only repetitious but inclined now and then to wax downright flowery.

The company enlisted by producer Harry Howard for the drama plays earnestly under Frank Merlino's sympathetic direction, and the venture may be put down as a well-meaning effort that is not, we fear, destined for success in the Broadway play market.

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NEW YORK TIMES  
March 29, 1940

## Crime Doesn't Pay

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ANY one who wants to feel miserable can safely visit "The Scene of the Crime," which was put on at the Fulton last evening. For Frank Gould, heretofore an actor, has chosen the most miserable topic he could think of for the moment and without much ingenuity he has made a full evening of misery out of it.

Offstage in the first act one of the Hanley boys murders a subway cashier. What interests Mr. Gould is the state of mind of the innocent Hanley family while the boy is being electrocuted—offstage, thank heaven—and during the long months afterward. They don't feel very chipper. Neither do the actors. The audience doesn't feel so good for that matter.

In addition to being despondent Mr. Gould is a dull writer. Dismal words flow out of him in remarkable abundance. Sad as the members of the Hanley family are, they are numerous, and Mr. Gould sends them in and out of the door on thousands of disconsolate errands all evening. There is one cheerful part, played with some humor by Louis Sorin. After a brief scene in the first act Mr. Gould, out of respect for the dramatic unities, forgets that part until the last act. This department has never been so glad to see an actor as when Mr. Sorin pops in for a few moments late in the play, just before the Hanley parents turn on the gas. Louis, how's about sneaking in somewhere in the second act? Louis, speak one kind word!

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## 'The Scene of the Crime,' Tearful Drama, Opens at the Fulton

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

IF "The Scene of the Crime," which opened at the Fulton last evening, were many times better than it is it might achieve the dignity of tragedy and not bog glumly down as one of the theater's small misadventures. This brief sob over spilt milk may be taken as a tribute to the sudden earnestness of the author, Frank Gould. It is the only tribute possible to Mr. Gould, whose writing is compounded in about equal measure of good intentions and tears.

Mr. Gould is weeping over the fate of a family of New York apartment dwellers, one of whose members commits murder during a holdup. The sweetness of the family life before this off-stage catastrophe is almost pathological. Subdued young lovers crowd the living room and father and mother coo contentedly. But the murder changes everything. Agony enters these lives and is expressed at length. When the hour approaches for the execution of the boy's death sentence the suffering is universal and infinitely wordy. And in the last act the ghost of the boy sits in the house, because nobody can forget him, and things go from bad to worse until the old couple subside gently in a suicide which isn't, I'm afraid, going to help matters a bit.

It's impossible to think of anything which would help matters. Perhaps Mr. Gould had an idea, although that is open to debate. Certainly he was as serious as an author could well be. He was also as inept. His writing is

drably depressed, full of banality and moralizing, wearily and almost endlessly circling about nothing in particular. The only positive emotion he manages to arouse is embarrassment coupled with a fairly strong desire to go away.

None of the unfortunate actors involved can do much more than struggle on Mr. Gould's dramatic fly-paper. Louis Sobin who appears only briefly, does manage to suggest a visitor from another and a happier play. One or two others are personally blameless and of the several who merely make a bad matter worse it would be kinder not to speak. It would be kinder also not to speak any more about "The Scene of the Crime," as a matter of fact.

### CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS

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# "The Scene of the Crime"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, March 29, 1940

## "Scene of the Crime" Story of a Bad Boy And Family Agony

"The Scene of the Crime," drama by Frank Gould. Produced by Harry Howard at the Fulton Theatre, New York, March 28, 1940.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

HAVING twice changed the title of "The Scene of the Crime" (It was called "No Heaven on Earth" originally), Frank Gould, the author, and Harry Howard, the producer, might reasonably have taken a third chance and called it "The Return of David Hanley."

David is the bad boy of the story who, as one of a stickup trio, had been convicted of murder and sent to the chair. After his execution David's spirit, like that of Peter Grimm, returns to his home, which is the real scene of the crime, because it is David's family that suffers the greater agony of his punishment.

This, for an act and a half, both in the writing, by Author Gould, and in the direction of Frank Merlín, is a plausible and moving story told and acted by believable humans.

Report of David's crime tends to cement family loyalty and to rally family friends.

Father, mother, sisters, brothers, and a variety of in-laws, present and prospective, take the situation in their several strides and are prepared to accept it and carry on.

But the dramatist, and his director, one or both, decide at this point to follow conventional and disillusioning theatrical formulas.

The night of the execution arrives. There are tears and lamentations, emotional crises and hysterical outbursts, until the whole thing becomes painfully theatrical and as painfully unreal.

Misdirected actors set their teeth in the emotional clichés and tear the drama apart. Which, I think, is rather a pity.

The third act is saved in part by the appearance of the dead boy as a dull gray spirit. His attempt to save his people from the tragic consequences of his crime are measurably effective, but I am afraid the recovery is not enough to save the play.

### Capable Players

At the Fulton Theatre, where "The Scene of the Crime" was presented last night, there was praise for the evenness and consistency of the company's performances.

Hanley daughters and daughters-in-law were well played by Sheila Trent, Louise Latimer, Margaret Callahan and Kittie Cosgriff. Hanley sons, represented by Chester Stratton, David Wayne and Allan Hale, were a proper match for them.

King Calder, a philosophical medic, was a likable person as well, and Louis Sorin added a familiar, though limited, comedy relief. Elaine Kent and Hallam Bosworth played the distressed parents as well as their director permitted, overdoing only at his command.

There is a practical setting by Cirkor and Robbins and competent lighting by James Riley.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, March 29, 1940

## The Scene of the Crime Opens at Fulton Theater

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THE Scene of the Crime, a play by Frank Gould which was presented for no plausible reason last night at the Fulton Theater, breaks the pleasant chain of post-Easter theatrical offerings and becomes a leading candidate for the title of the season's worst play.

To list all of the good qualities that are absent from this maudlin treatment of a banal and boring problem in crime and all of the bad qualities that infest it would serve no good purpose, and this review will be mercifully brief. It is one of those things one would rather not mention at all.

For the record, it may be stated that Mr. Gould's story is that of a good, hard-working family which suffers the misfortune of having one black sheep in its membership. The black sheep is executed for murder during the second act, while the family moans, groans and shrieks back in their unhappy little home. The third act is devoted to the disintegration of the family and the suicide by gas of the father and mother, while the murderer's ghost returns to the apartment

to suffer the torture of viewing the wreckage he has caused. Somebody was knocking at the apartment door when the final curtain fell, and I trust that whoever it was was too late.

The unlucky 13 members of the cast acted as if they were highly embarrassed, as no doubt they were. It always has been an axiom of criminology that the murderer returns to the scene of the crime. That is nonsense. The most hardened criminal would not return to this one.

### "THE SCENE OF THE CRIME"

A play in three acts by Frank Gould; staged by Frank Merlín; presented at the Fulton Theater on March 28, 1940, by Harry Howard. The cast:

|                       |                   |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Arthur Hanley.....    | Hallam Bosworth   |
| Tobias Rosenfeld..... | Louis Sorin       |
| Edith Hanley.....     | Elaine Kent       |
| Stella Hanley.....    | Kittie Cosgriff   |
| David Hanley.....     | Chester Stratton  |
| Jean.....             | Louise Latimer    |
| Katherine.....        | Sheila Trent      |
| Marion Hanley.....    | Margaret Callahan |
| Larry Pearson.....    | Robert Morrow     |
| Jimmy Hanley.....     | David Wayne       |
| Spence.....           | Howard Lane       |
| Bob Hanley.....       | Allan Hale        |
| Dr. William Hood..... | King Calder       |

Reprinted from

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE

March 29, 1940

### Killer's Family

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IT IS the sound contention of the author of "The Scene of the Crime" that it isn't pleasant to have a murderer in the family. At this point, however, the playwright's soundness seems to have left him, for I must say that his play is as sad a mess as the season has offered us. He is very earnest and tragic and grim-visaged about it all, but he is also pretty foolish in his story-telling, and the new work must go down as the drama at its most fatuous. A number of actors strive earnestly to give life to the proceedings, but the only thing that happens to them is that they get a lot of exercise. Few plays of recent years have demanded that the players dart on and off stage and back and forth amid the furniture so strenuously.

In fact, there was one potentially fascinating point when it seemed likely that one of the members of the Hanley family was going to trip over the actor playing a ghost. Oh, yes, there is a ghost in Mr. Gould's play. The criminal, the dramatist reminds us, always returns to the scene of the crime, and, since a murderer's real sin is against his family, a Lillom-like providence sends him back home after his execution. He got back just in time to find that his father and mother, feeling that they had wrecked the lives of their other children, were doing away with themselves. Being a greatly handicapped ghost, he couldn't do anything about it, and the play ends with a graceful double suicide by gas. You may observe, even without bothering to visit it, that "The Scene of the Crime" is a gay little knick-knack.

Since it is just as well to let the unhappy actors go in peace, I might tell you a little more about the plot. It appears that the Hanleys were a fine and devoted family, but that there was a black-sheep son. He went about with gangsters and finally killed somebody in a holdup. In the second act the family is waiting for news of the bad boy's electrocution. In the third act his ghost comes back and mother and father take gas. Having thus proved with fine conclusiveness that I played to the end of "The Scene of the Crime" I should report that, thanks to the exigencies of casting, the children of the Hanley family looked so much alike that there was some difficulty in telling them apart. This was, no doubt, part of the realism of the play, but it did add to the confusion. It might have caused some trouble to the playgoers if, by chance, any one had really cared.



# "Lady In Waiting"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, March 28, 1940

## Life With Mother

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

**A**FTER her long sojourn in the cinema, Miss Gladys George returns to us with her great gifts as a comedienne intact. She has, if anything, added a few new ones, and she is certainly the life of the party in Brock Pemberton's production of Margery Sharp's "Lady in Waiting." Thanks to her expert playing, considerable life and interest are whipped up in Miss Sharp's dramatization of her own novel, "The Nutmeg Tree," and it seems likely at the moment that the new play will prove to be the latest on the newly awakened drama season's list of hits. If this turns out to be the case, Mr. Pemberton and Miss Sharp will have every reason to be grateful to Miss George.

For "Lady in Waiting," despite a number of amusing scenes, proves to be more intermittent than consistent in its hilarity and carries about it the curious air of an earlier day in the theater. But the star and a good cast perform with such wisdom that the new work showed every first-night sign of prosperity.

There is one particularly exasperating trait in "Lady in Waiting." It almost always seems on the verge of developing into the consistently delightful comedy that it should be and then, just as you are sitting back waiting for the fun to continue, the play begins marking time once more. The story of the American chorus girl who had married into an English upper-class family during the first World War and returns to her late husband's stuffy family to try straightening out her priggish daughter's

love affair assuredly has its ins and outs as story telling, but the author has wisely added some helpful extraneous episodes. In the best of them she has created the Genocchio family. The Six Flying Genochios, who are really only five in number, enter the heroine's life during a wild Channel crossing, and they add considerably to the festivity of the proceedings. Best of all is Mother Genocchio, a fine old reprobate of a woman, who has trouble with drink and seasickness and is the most admirable of all the people you meet in "Lady in Waiting."

The episode on the Channel is one of the good things of the new play, and so is Miss George's first appearance, a splendid emergence from the bath tub to confound her somewhat difficult creditors. In fact, it is such

incidents as these, which are but loosely connected with the general theme, that are the pleasant features of Miss Sharp's work. I think you will also be rather pleased with Sir William Warring, the eminent British diplomatist, who turns out to be so understanding a friend and then ardent admirer of the heroine. The other characters, in particular the priggish daughter, are less appetizing personages, though, and their adventures are not always particularly enticing. The account of the gay lady of the stage in conflict with the stuffy institution of British respectability should have made for more pointed and enlivening satire and more amusing farcical developments than "Lady in Waiting" usually has to offer. I think that somehow we might have something funnier than the sight of Miss George giving Miss Mary Heberden a sound kick for her snobishness.

If the narrative is not all that it should have been, the acting certainly is. Miss George makes the gay ex-chorus girl, who would like to be a ladylike mother, not only a vivid and amusing person, but a real and likable one, and by the humorous vitality of her playing makes the comedy seem alive when the writing is something less than that. Hers is one of the life-saving performances of the season. Alan Napier makes the English diplomatist an engaging figure, and Miss Ethel Morrison is a delight as Mother Genocchio. Miss Carol Curtis-Brown plays the unpleasant daughter relentlessly and yet with considerable charm and Miss Heberden, even when taking her kick from Miss George as a second-act climax, maintains her haughty dignity. Stephen Ker Appleby is believable as the disagreeable daughter's caddish fiancé, Leonard Penn offers a good portrait as the highly moral Genocchio, who is more shocked than the aristocracy by the ex-show girl's frivolity. But, of course, it is Miss George who dominates the play and is likely to bring success to an intermittently entertaining comedy.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, March 28, 1940

## Gladys George Plays Fine 'Lady in Waiting'

"Lady in Waiting," comedy by Margery Sharp, presented by Brock Pemberton at the Martin Beck Theatre, New York, March 27, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By JOHN CHAPMAN

**E**VER since Margery Sharp's novel, "The Nutmeg Tree," appeared quite a few seasons ago it has been taken for granted that somebody would make a play out of it for Gladys George. Patience was rewarded last night when Miss George appeared at the Martin Beck in "Lady in Waiting"—same being several amusing handfuls of the book.

The patience was largely Brock Pemberton's and the reward will be his, too. Under his and Antoinette Perry's guidance Miss Sharp has fashioned a very pleasant and faithful stage version of a friendly and funny book, and Miss George plays the role of a warm-hearted pushover as well as everybody expected she would.

"Lady in Waiting" is not a comedy to set one a-whoopin' and a-hollerin'. It is an affable version of an old story—the triumph in fairly high society of a person who hasn't fancy manners but who has a good heart. Tyrone

Power's father played it in "A Texas Steer" and Will Rogers played it all his life on and off the screen. It is a satisfying comedy.

### Daughter Wants Mamma

Miss George is Julia, an ex-show girl who

is now the mother of a grown daughter by a World War soldier whom Julia married when she was "barely thirteen." The father never came back from the war and the child was brought up in rich Riviera surroundings by her paternal grandmother, while Julia shifted for herself in London.

Daughter sends a hurry call to a forgotten mother because she needs the old girl's consent to her marriage. Julia sells her remaining possessions, consisting chiefly of a grandfather's clock which she has hidden from the bailiffs in her bathroom, and sets out for southern France. On the Channel boat she encounters a troupe of acrobats and a British statesman who is practically Anthony Eden himself.

### Julia Wins a Title

Since Julia has a warm and impulsive affection, she falls not only for the head acrobat but also for Sir William. When she gets to where she is going she shocks her prudish daughter, unmasks the girl's playboy fiancé, is pursued by the acrobat—who turns out to be a palm-singing snob—and is won by Sir William, who happens to be visiting the same place.

Mr. Pemberton's casting and Miss Perry's direction have made it all very pleasant. Miss George is not as buxom as an old "Nutmeg Tree" fancier might have imagined, but she is nevertheless a perfect Julia and a comedienne who knows timing and doubletakes. England's Alan Napier, a tall Anthony Eden with one Wallace Beery eyebrow, is a satisfying Sir William.

The rest of the roles are capably filled. Ethel Morrison, as the seasick matriarch of the acrobatic troupe, has a magnificent entrance down a stair into the saloon of a Channel boat. Carol Curtis-Brown is a nasty little snip who doesn't deserve Julia for a mother, and the minor parts are cast and played with care.

The settings, all the way from a hall bathroom to a French villa, are John Root's.

# "Lady In Waiting"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, March 28, 1940

## 'Lady in Waiting,' With Gladys George, Is Offered at the Martin Beck

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

MARGERY SHARP has turned her gay little novel, "The Nutmeg Tree," into an equally gay but considerably more emphatic little comedy which is called "Lady in Waiting" and is ornamented by the irrepressible Gladys George. It opened most cheerfully last evening at the Martin Beck, with Miss George scintillating rapidly in all directions and proving that kind hearts, when combined with impish dispositions, can get the better of coronets.

You may remember the Julia Packett of Miss Sharp's story, and if you are not so fortunate you will want to meet her. She is warm-hearted and impetuous and

she would find it easy to be a lady, a thing she would much like to be, if there were not so many men in the world. But all her life Julia's arms opened automatically when an attractive man appeared and she gave too much away to be either respectable or solvent. But she married once and had a daughter who lived correctly in France with her paternal grandmother and turned out to be a prig.

Julia was barricked in her bath, with hair-lifts yammering outside, when a summons came from daughter asking that a suitor be seen and inspected. Julia got out of the bath and went to France, failing for acrobats and diplomats on the way. The full impact of her bubbling naturalness still had conservatism

reeling in her mother-in-law's correct home when Julia's past began to catch up with her. Acrobats who had passed in the night came out of bushes, and the priggish daughter was shocked. Daughter's young man cast an impatient eye on Julia and Julia was required, finally, to kick a proper young woman hard in the right place.

Some of this is in the book and some of it isn't, but Julia gets her man here much as she did in the novel. She is louder and broader and more obviously funny. For Miss George's benefit, she is endowed with an American accent. Horseplay takes the place of wit rather often, but it is Miss George's horseplay, and

### 'LADY IN WAITING'

A comedy in three acts by Margery Sharp, based on her novel, "The Nutmeg Tree"; directed by Antoinette Perry; settings by John Root; presented at the Martin Beck Theater on March 27, 1940, by Brock Pemberton. The cast: Anthelmine.....Michelette Burani Susan Packett.....Carol Curtis-Brown Bryan Relton.....Stephen Ker Appleby Mrs. Packett.....Lenore Chippendale Julia Packett.....Gladys George Griffin.....Anita Bolster Burns, Room Steward.....Paul A. Foley Rogers, Bar Steward.....Guy Spaul Sir William Warring.....Alan Napier Esme Bellingham.....Mary Heberden Willie Genocchio.....Walter Moore Fred Genocchio.....Leonard Penn "Ma" Genocchio.....Ethel Morrison Joe Genocchio.....James Decker Bert Genocchio.....Albert Allen

that's all right. The author has done a neat job of telescoping and Miss George does an even neater one of expanding her part into ribald gaiety. It's a slight play at bottom and leans heavily on its star. But Miss George and her generally able assistants can put tottering scenes on their feet and make them dance.

The able assistants include Alan Napier suavely impersonating the knight who finally makes Julia a lady; Anita Bolster, who is forthrightly funny as Julia's dour maid; Leonard Penn, who makes a handsome and vigorous acrobat, and Carol Curtis-Brown, who does nicely in the arduous part of the priggish daughter. The others do nicely, too; Ethel Morrison particularly so as a mother of acrobats.

But "Lady in Waiting" remains about three-quarters Miss George, with her faintly hoarse voice and her small sounds of rage and her delicate heartiness of method. Being three-quarters Miss George never did a comedy any harm, either.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, March 28, 1940

## Ladies in Waiting Another Triumph for Miss George

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

GLADYS GEORGE, the well-remembered blond siren of Personal Appearance, adds another delicious characterization to the list of captivating hussies she has portrayed on the stage and screen in Lady in Waiting, a farce presented last night at the Martin Beck Theater by Brock Pemberton.

This is Mr. Pemberton's first presentation since the fascinating and bitter satire, Kiss the Boys Goodbye. As a play it hasn't the driving force of Clare Booth's biting wit, but it does have an atmosphere of rollicking good humor about it that makes for an entertaining evening.

It cannot be said that there is much novelty in Lady in Waiting, which was constructed out of her own novel, The Nutmeg Tree, by Margery Sharp. The situation—a mother of questionable morals and doubtful career reunited to her daughter who has been reared in refinement—is not strange or unusual enough to call for exclamations of glad surprise. But under these circumstances it devolves upon Miss George to make the farce worth seeing through her personality and treatment of the heroine. And this she accomplishes.

Wickedness as defined by the blue-noses is generally very inviting, particularly when it is accompanied by the relieving traits of generosity, kindness and, in this particular instance, a deep maternal instinct. Look at the popularity of Mae West's characters. Most gentlemen cast away on a desert island would choose La Du Barry as a companion in preference to the virtuous, let us say, Carrie Nation. Consequently their sympathies are with Miss George in her role as the hotsty-totsty Julia

Packett, rather than with the conventional stuffed shirts against whom she does battle for her daughter in this new play.

Miss Sharp's play gives us another bathroom scene, and Miss George's first greeting to her old friends in New York is from the tub. The room lacks the luxurious fittings of Crystal's bath in The Women, but with Miss George in it, who, pray tell, would bother looking at marble panels or gilt faucets?

As you may know if you read The Nutmeg Tree (which I haven't), Julia Packett goes from her bathroom in London by Channel boat to France. On the way she meets many interesting people, including the Five Genochios, an acrobatic troupe; a snooty debutante from London's West End and a knight who is taking a holiday from his labors at the Foreign Office.

The entire company winds up, by twos and threes, at an estate in France where Julia's daughter is being brought up by her paternal grandmother. Julia, you see, has been summoned to a family conference regarding her daughter's engagement to a particularly offensive Englishman. The family wants to break it up, and if you saw the man you wouldn't blame them.

The remainder of the play revolves around Julia's attempts to masquerade as a lady instead of the lovely tramp she has been, and her exposure by the unkind society girl. You will be glad to find out, however, that virtue does NOT triumph in the end and that she captures her man. Pawn takes knish!

Miss George is just about all there is to Lady in Waiting. Perhaps she is enough. Alan Napier, imported from England via Hollywood to play the role of the knight, has an engaging stage presence and is a pleasant actor. Anita Bolster overplayed and overstrung the part of a lady's maid, but the audience enjoyed her antics. Leonard Penn needs either coaching or practice in his cockney accent. Ethel Morrison is excellent as Mrs. Genocchio.

# "Lady In Waiting"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, March 28, 1940

## Gladys George Returns in Margery Sharp's First Theatre Work, 'Lady in Waiting'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

COUNT it as good fortune that Gladys George, the aureate blonde, has opportunity to run through all her paces in Margery Sharp's "Lady in Waiting," which was put on in Martin Beck's house last evening. Cast as the vulgar mother of a priggish snip, the incredible George is immensely funny and likable. In the second scene she is introduced in a bathtub, which is probably good for business. It leads directly into one of the neatest tricks of invisible dressing the stage has recently devised. After that Miss George gets quickly down to the business of pretending eagerly to a culture that is beyond her range and breaking down satisfactorily into the joyous dance of a good time. Since a kind of honest naïveté shows through the bawling that comes most naturally to her style of acting, we might as well consider her a blonde phenomenon and let it go at that.

If she were sitting in as drama reviewer she would probably refer to the play as kind of corny. Margery Sharp has made it out of her own novel, "The Nutmeg Tree," and, with Brock Pemberton's consent as producer, offers

it as her first stage work. It is the story of a flighty showgirl with a vast appetite for revelry who happens also to be the mother of a cold, intellectual girl brought up amid refinements abroad. What Miss Sharp does, after some amusing preparations, is to introduce the mother to good society at the time when the daughter is choosing a suitor. Against a stiff background the mother loosens up remarkably and cuts some raucous capers.

In the beginning the plot uncovers several amusing episodes. For Julia Packett, as the mother is named, is an exuberant gal whose intentions are of the best, although cheerfulness is always breaking in and her heart is warm. As an old showgirl, crossing the channel, she cannot resist the handsomest of "The Six Genocchiois," who are a celebrated acrobatic act. And when she finally arrives at her daughter's house her brassy vitality keeps everything lively. But "Lady in Waiting" has nothing more to offer than that. Ultimately it dwindles down to the heart of gold and the world of polite society. "I want you for myself," Sir William Warring of the Foreign Office finally confesses, thus drowning a lusty comedy in banality.

Since Alan Napier is a gentleman as well as an actor, he speaks the ultimate stereotype without a shudder, and lounges affably through the part on his first appearance in America. Under Antoinette Perry's bustling direction the performance is broad and the tempo is rapid. Stephen Ker Appleby plays a condescending part inoffensively, which is a neat trick, too. And Leonard Penn, Anita Bolster, Carol Curtis-Brown, Michele Burani, Lenore Chippendale and Ethel Morrison run through other stock parts as briskly as possible. As scene designer, John Root has turned out some attractive interiors and a practical bathroom.

But it would be wisest to regard "Lady in Waiting" as Miss George's personal appearance in a series of animated episodes. She is a spontaneous merry-maker. Nothing is too outrageous to seem plausible as she does it. The blend of innocence, gaudiness and instant capitulation, topped off by frantic blonde hair, make a character that can be conservatively described as interesting. "I want you for myself," is probably an inevitable line, although it certainly means trouble in the long run.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, March 28, 1940

## Gladys George Appears in "Lady In Waiting"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

ALTHOUGH "Lady in Waiting" enjoys its occasional spurts of gaiety in its earlier scenes, the dramatization Margery Sharp has made of her novel, "The Nutmeg Tree," is not a successful one. It labors industriously for a while, and then seems to grow tired of its own efforts. Its intermittent laughs dwindle into smiles and its smiles taper off until what is obviously meant to be a gay and giddy farce about a tough woman trying to be a lady ends up by being something of an overlong siesta.

Even Gladys George appears to weary in Mr. Pemberton's production at the Martin Beck of trying to keep Julia the hilariously unconventional figure that readers of Miss Sharp's book insist she was on the printed page. Miss George gets off to a good start. Seated in a bath tub with her back to the audience she makes the most personal of personal appearances. Beginning gaily in so natural a fashion, she maintains her high spirits during the funniest scene of the play—the mad one upon a channel boat when, on the way to visit her very genteel prig of a daughter in France, Julia has her moments, both love and sea-sick, with an amusing family of trapeze artists known as the Genocchiois.

### Gladys George as Julia

Miss George continues to be fairly funny even when she is called upon to play the old, old scene of the diamond-in-the-rough among some rhinestones set in platinum. Soon thereafter Miss George gives indications of having grown tired. So does the play. So does the au-

dience. Unfortunately Miss George's skill for sustaining farce is no match for either her face or her figure. Even more unfortunately Miss Sharp's dramatization does not equal in its merits Miss George's skill for sustaining farce.

Miss Perry's direction fails to help a script that suffers, among other things, from monotony. The whole evening, by being so constantly over-keyed and so incessantly devoted to broad effects which come off only once in a while, conspires to dampen gaiety rather than to create it and maintain it.

Accordingly, after its promising beginning "Lady in Waiting" sags into dullness, in spite of the Anthony Edeniah charm of Alan Napier, the reliable comic efforts of Ethel Morrison, and the contributions of Miss George. What ought to have been very funny ends up by being tepid, old-fashioned, and downright silly.

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# "Ladies in Retirement"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, March 27, 1940

## 'Ladies in Retirement,' English Scare-Drama, Opens at Henry Miller's

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

ONE of those substantial, slow-paced melodramas of murder which the English on occasion do so well come into Henry Miller's Theater last evening under the innocent-seeming title, "Ladies in Retirement." It is not the best of its genre, which includes such shivery items as "Night Must Fall," but it is a long way from the worst. Threat hangs satisfactorily over imperiled characters and at the end there are sinister doings to raise the hair.

Edward Percy and Reginald Denham, the authors, have laid their crime in an old house on the Thames marshes and in the 1880s, when spinsters were more menacing than they have since become. They provide a cavernous fireplace oven for the disposal of corpses and the grimmer moments are accompanied by a howling wind and the gloomy beat of rain upon the roof. Things grow mighty scary about then and one willingly forgets that Mr. Percy and Mr. Denham have allowed themselves a singularly long windup. They are not authors who believe in hurrying matters.

Their central character is a black-clad housekeeper, living with a pleasant, chattering old woman who was once a chorus girl and still likes bright tunes and other comforts. But the housekeeper owns a pair of mildly

demented sisters and brings them to the marshes for a visit. They settle in on the pleasant old lady and she bears with them for months, although their ways are very odd. But finally she orders them out and then, when argument fails, the housekeeper strangles to protect her own. One must, she feels, make sacrifices for the family.

What happens afterward, and how the housekeeper's nephew and a serving maid are involved in it, you had probably better find out for yourself. You will discover that the authors have been a good deal too leisurely about their murdering and that the sus-

### 'LADIES IN RETIREMENT'

A melodrama in two acts by Edward Percy and Reginald Denham; staged by Mr. Denham; setting by Raymond Sovey; costumes by Helene Pons; presented at Henry Miller's Theater on March 26 1940, by Gilbert Miller. The cast:  
Lucy Gilham..... Evelyn Ankers  
Leonora Pike..... Isobel Elsom  
Ellen Creed..... Flora Robson  
Albert Feather..... Patrick O'Moore  
Louisa Creed..... Estelle Winwood  
Emily Creed..... Jessamine Newcombe  
Sister Theresa..... Florence Edney

pense is too often dissipated by comedy. Tightening here and cutting there would have made it twice the shiver it now is and a little more invention in the first two acts would not have hurt. But it is solid-scaredrama, with the characters all alive except the one who is darkly dead and securely walled up and seems to reappear once as a ghost and doesn't. This whets the appetite, I trust.

It is excellently acted. Miss Flora Robson, making her American debut, is a formidable murderess and a human one and when she wishes commands the stage. Miss Estelle Winwood, as a middle-aged Ophelia, does some of the best acting of her career and Jessamine Newcombe is gloomily odd as the last of the three weird sisters. Miss Isobel Elsom's engaging performance as the victim makes murder a darker crime and Evelyn Ankers in an attractive maid and screams beautifully at the end. Patrick O'Moore, save for one unaccountable lapse into burlesque, is admirable as the ferret nephew. They'll give you shivers if you give them time.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, March 27, 1940

## Ladies in Retirement Good, Strong Melodrama

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THE mere description of the scene in which Edward Percy and Reginald Denham have placed the happenings of their new play, Ladies in Retirement, provides a foretaste of the grim events that go to make the evening at Henry Miller's Theater happily and satisfactorily horrifying.

"The scene is laid," we read, "in the living room of an old house on the marshes of the Thames estuary, some 10 miles to the east of Gravesend." In such a setting, as wild and lonely as any of the foggy dunes over which the hound of the Baskervilles ranged in Conan Doyle's day, it is inevitable that murder should be done.

And so it is, dexterously, quickly and almost comfortably, by means of a red silk noose in the hands of a determined and cunning woman, who thereafter walls up the body of her victim in a disused brick oven. A touch, you will observe, of the Edgar Allen Poe.

Ladies in Retirement was presented last night by Gilbert Miller, who does the melodrama not only the courtesy of a splendid setting, but the honor of an exceptionally good cast, headed by Flora Robson in as sinister a role as has been seen hereabouts in years.

It is good melodrama, and it is all the more frightening because, unlike so many of their fellows in the field of lurid mystery drama, the authors are logical and lucid throughout the play. They even provide a

measure of reason, though never of justification, for the murder itself. The murderess, in this case, actually believes that by committing the crime she might provide comfort and security for her old age, and a pleasant home for her two incompetent aunts who are somewhat barmy or, in the words of one of the characters, decidedly potty.

The fact that this comfortable home on the marshes belongs neither to the aunts nor to the murderess, but to a dear old lady who has befriended all three of them, doesn't enter into the question. The dear old lady has, unfortunately for herself, decided to throw them all out of the house on the excellent grounds that they have combined to make a cuckoo's nest out of it. She doesn't

want the elder aunt dragging driftwood and seashells and dead birds through her living room and scratching the polish off the antiques. It makes her nervous.

Her decision to push them out of the nest seals her doom, for the niece of the potty aunts slips quickly up behind her while she is playing the Titwillow song from the Mikado on her spinet and singing it in a pathetically cracked voice, and chokes off the song as the first act curtain descends.

The later appearance of a young man who is also related to this unholy family, and who is by way of being an embarras himself, brings complications that finally result in retribution.

Miss Robson, making her New York debut, does a striking piece of characterization in the somber garb and manner of the murderess. In contrast to the silly but innocuous senility of the aunts, her own madness is that of a deadly and determined brain that will brook no obstacle to her desires. A Lady Macbeth whose ambition rises not so high as kingdoms, but only to the goal of seeing her aunts comfy and cozy. Miss Robson made the character plausible, real and vivid.

One of the most delightful performances of the evening was that of Isobel Elsom, as the dear old victim. While Miss Elsom, necessarily, was seen no more after being walled up in the oven, the warm personality she projected during the first act carried through the play and helped immeasurably in keeping the play itself alive.

Estelle Winwood gave her best rounded and cleverest portrayal of several years in the role of one of the nit-wit aunts, and Jessamine Newcombe was excellent as her sister. Patrick O'Moore, also playing his first American engagement, acted with skill and confidence, in a minor role. Evelyn Ankers, a blond English girl of rare beauty, showed high talent, and the scream with which she rent the air when she discovered there was a murderess loose in the house is still ringing in my ears.

It is all good, strong melodrama, built for stout hearts.

# "Ladies in Retirement"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, March 27, 1940

## Murder Near the Thames

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

PLACE it to the credit of the English that they have provided us with just the sort of good, sound murder play that the dramatic season has been so insistently demanding. Thanks to some uncommonly effective acting by Miss Flora Robson and an excellent supporting cast, this "Ladies in Retirement" is a tense, taut and properly literate melodrama that should satisfy the requirements of even the more captious followers of theatrical homicide. The amiable tale of a stern lady who murders her benefactress to provide a home for her two imbecilic sisters, it manages to be shrewd in its dramatic devices, sound in its characterization and persuasive in its terror, and I would put it down as an extremely successful attempt to add to the literature of the horror drama. The English do these things with both guile and intelligence, and "Ladies in Retirement" also manages to be admirably civilized about its excitement.

If I have one complaint to make against "Ladies in Retirement" it is that it kills off its most attractive character at the end of the first act. Leonora Fiske, who had been a show girl and quite the toast of the younger peers of her day, until she settled down in her home on the marshes of the Thames estuary to live on the profits of her career as a belle, is as amusing and likable an old lady as the recent drama has shown us, and it is difficult to forgive her faithless

companion for doing her in, even if her murderess did have to look out for her two dim-witted sisters. Anyway, poor Leonora is strangled at her piano while playing "Tit Willow," and it looks for a time as if the crime would go unpunished. But Ellen Creed, the slayer, had the misfortune to have a scape-grace nephew who was fleeing from the law, and it is he who turns out to be the dubious instrument of justice. I don't think I should tell you much more about the plot.

As in the case of most good English murder plays, there is no attempt to fool you about the identity of the slayer. The suspense lies in the murderess's battle with her conscience and in the efforts of the sly and disagreeable nephew to ferret out the secret

of that bricked-in oven which contains the remains of the unfortunate Leonora Fiske. The young man, I may tell you, has no interest in seeing that justice shall triumph. His plan is merely to blackmail his aunt, and I think that, despite your objections to the homicidal lady, you will be on her side when she terrifies her nephew by hinting that she might do to him what she has done to her benefactress. The first murder, she tells him pleasantly, is the hardest. Naturally, the tale of "Ladies in Retirement" is politely told, for that is the fashion of the English in their murder plays, but that does not keep it from being excellent fun for all of those who enjoy fictional and stage assassinations.

Miss Robson, making her local debut, is nothing short of brilliant as the murderess, making her a figure both sinister and strangely sympathetic and keeping her all ways an entirely believable person. An actress of exceptional force and talent is Miss Robson, and I trust the New York theater will be seeing a lot of her. No less effective, though, is Miss Isabel Elsom as the victim of the first-act homicide. Miss Elsom makes this gay and kind-hearted old girl so delightful a person that her untimely taking-off seems especially to be lamented. The two half-witted sisters are excellently played by Miss Estelle Winwood and Miss Jessamine Newcomb, with Miss Winwood being particularly amusing and singularly touching as the more kittenish of the pair. There are good performances, too, by Patrick O'Moore as the scheming nephew, by Miss Evelyn Ankers as the maid who aids justice somewhat unwillingly, and by Miss Florence Edney as a friendly nun. Raymond Sovey's set is properly atmospheric and Mr. Denham's direction is helpful. "Ladies in Retirement" is a good show.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, March 27, 1940

## "Ladies in Retirement" Offers Many Thrills

By JOHN MASON BROWN

WITH an admirable cast, Gilbert Miller produced last night "Ladies in Retirement," a melodrama by Edward Percy and Reginald Denham which, both as acted and as written, turns out to be the murder play New York has been starved for these many, many months.

Mr. Percy's and Mr. Denham's script is no childish thriller. It does not depend for its shuddery suspense upon any such easy tricks as sliding panels, clutching hands, shrieks in the dark, or ghosts that air their bedding under green spotlights. The basis of its excitement is a set of believable characters, shrewdly observed and well-established, who move and are moved with uncanny skill through a plot which doubles its tension by steadfastly refusing to follow an expected course.

### An Exciting Melodrama

A retired chorus girl; a breezy, pleasant old person, under whose flaming red wig memories still swarm of her younger, less respectable days of gold-digging, is shown as the now comfortably endowed owner of a lonely farmhouse on the marshes of the Thames estuary near Gravesend. There she lives with a companion-housekeeper, an old maid who has lost the little money she worked hard to collect, and lives happily until in a moment of show-girl generosity she permits her companion to invite her two

daffy sisters to her home as guests. The companion's worthless nephew, a cheap borrower, a blackmailer, and a light-fingered thief, also turns up like the bad bad penny that he truly is.

Even before the nephew's arrival things have not been going well in Miss Fiske's ménage. Miss Fiske and her housekeeper's two moonstruck sisters do not get along well. The sisters have long outstayed their welcome. Miss Fiske can stand their whisperings and their childish ways no longer. She demands that they take their departure. But she has not considered the desperate situation or the character of her housekeeper-companion who has no place to which she can send her sisters. Providing for these

luckless women has been the luckless housekeeper's lifelong job. She likes her benefactress, but she likes her sisters more. She begins to plot, and carries her plan into terrific action. The absorbing question from then on is how long the housekeeper can get away with what she has done when her unscrupulous nephew is nosing into her secrets. If all this seems tame when exposed to the chill of a synopsis, believe me it is anything but tame as one sits spellbound before it at the Henry Miller's. The authors of "Ladies in Retirement" know their job.

### A Brilliant Cast

The authors of "Ladies in Retirement" are no less fortunate in their actors than they are capable in their plotting. Flora Robson, who is making her New York debut as the companion-housekeeper, is a brilliant performer. She has a personality of extraordinary force and a technical resourcefulness of infinite fascination.

As the glider of her two daffy sisters Estelle Winwood gives one of the outstanding performances of her career. She is willowy, indulant, rattle-brained, and yet at all times precise in her effects. Jessamine Newcomb is likewise admirable as the gruffer of the two touched sisters; the one who is always cluttering up Miss Fiske's parlor with dead birds found on the beach, bits of driftwood, feathers, flowers, and shears.

Isabel Elsom is in topnotch form, playing the red-wigged and ill-fated Miss Fiske so vividly and with such a perfection of detail that one hates to have her done away with. Patrick O'Moore as the saddy nephew, Evelyn Ankers as the pretty and susceptible maid, and Florence Edney as the neighborly nun also contribute highly satisfactory performances.

# "Ladies in Retirement"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, March 27, 1940

## 'Ladies in Retirement' Filled With Thrills and Good Acting

"Ladies in Retirement," drama by Edward Percy and Reginald Denham. Produced by Gilbert Miller at Henry Miller's Theatre, New York, March 26, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

NOW we come again upon a theatre job superbly done in this "Ladies in Retirement," offered by Gilbert Miller in Henry Miller's Theatre last night. And a theatre job well done is always a stimulating experience, whether it happens to furnish your favorite type of play or not.

"Ladies in Retirement" is another of those English murder melodramas set in an obscure corner of the tight little isle in which the audience is alternately thrilled or stirred to laughter.

Emlyn Williams' "Night Must Fall" was one such. "Payment Deferred," in which Charles Laughton made his local debut was another. And neither, I think, was as holding as this one.

Murder plays can be too obviously deliberate to be really thrilling. Frequently they are no more than advanced exercises in creating audience excitement.

"Ladies in Retirement" has the advantage of being brought into action by a human and, though slightly incredible, a believable motive. It is based, in fact, on a recorded crime.

### Three Sisters

Ellen Creed, the eldest of three sisters, and the sanest, is working as a friendly companion for Leonora Fiske, a retired actress living obscurely near the marsh lands of the Thames River.

Miss Creed asks her employer the privilege of inviting her sisters down for a holiday. Miss Fiske generously grants the request. The sisters arrive, are revealed as a pair

of slightly addled nuisances and, after their week's holiday has stretched into four months, are ordered back to London by their nerve-racked hostess.

The unwanted guests refuse to budge. Whereupon their sister Ellen, herself touched with the family weakness, decides to strangle Miss Fiske and turn the house over to her kin, for whose protection she feels responsible.

Thereafter the interest centers in the gradual breaking down of the unhappy Ellen's nerve, the discovery of her guilt by a blackmailing nephew and her own particular solution of her problem, about which you are privileged to do a lot of guessing.

### Fine Performance

"Ladies in Retirement" has the additional advantage of being about as well acted as any drama this season has been.

Flora Robson, the star, is a London favorite with whose work we have been familiar only through recent pictures, notably one called "Intermezzo."

She is a stalwart and convincing emotionalist, finely poised and thoroughly schooled in the niceties of characterization. She is able to arouse sympathy as well as create horror, and thus gives her performance that human quality that makes it credible and often fascinating.

Because all the parts are good acting parts it is possible for a second newcomer, an engaging young Irishman named Patrick O'Moore, hailing from Dublin and the Gate Theatre, to give the Robson role fine support as the wily and unscrupulous nephew. And another newcomer, a likely Evelyn Ankers, lifts a maid's role to importance.

### Happy Actors

Isobel Elsom, also English but with American successes to her credit, plays the unfortunate Miss Fiske so thoroughly and so attractively that her untimely garroting seems regrettable.

Finally we have Jessamine Newcombe and Estelle Winwood, neither of whom has had a decent part the last ten years, recovering their prestige as excellent actresses playing the sisters, And Florence Edney, another dependable, as a sister of charity.

The satisfaction of a knowing audience in the performances of these players was both apparent and heartening.

A Victorian interior, attractively stuffy, is provided by Raymond Sovey. The authors are Reginald Denham and Edward Percy, actors, and Mr. Denham did the directing, which is pretty close to faultless.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, March 27, 1940

## Flora Robson Makes Her Debut in a Horror Tale From London, 'Ladies in Retirement'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

FLORA ROBSON of London, and more recently of Hollywood, is making her New York debut in "Ladies in Retirement," which was put on at Henry Miller's last evening. It is a horror play that Edward Percy and Reginald Denham have made from a horror tale of French crimes and criminals, and London, blacked out for more urgent reasons, has latterly been quivering before it. Mr. Percy and Mr. Denham have written it with a good deal of British phlegm; and with the cooperation of a neatly chosen cast Mr. Denham has staged it impeccably, leaving the blood to run very coldly indeed. Nearly every one in the theatre last evening seemed to be pleasantly frightened at the gruesome turn that things were taking late at night. This department dwelled unhappily in a little world of polite indifference and probably should not be listened to this morning.

Is the murder justified? It is at least convenient. Somewhere on the marshes of the Thames estuary, some ten miles east of Gravesend, as the program points out, Leonora Fiske is living in comfortable retirement with Ellen Creed, an indigent old friend. Ellen has two unpleasant sisters

whom she is trying to salvage. Leonora cannot abide them, and orders Ellen to remove them. Blood being thicker than water and one person being easier to handle than two, Ellen does Leonora in by the least squeamish of methods, locks the ugly sin in her heart and keeps her two queer sisters living on comfortably with no questions asked. This carries "Ladies in Retirement" up to the end of the first act. Mr. Percy and Mr. Denham then proceed to horrify the audience for two more acts by letting Ellen's un-

scrupulous nephew suspect that his aunt has been up to something that is not very nice.

Probably the coolness of the writing and the familiar casualness of the narrative are the genius of this goose-flesh drama. Like honest Britons, Mr. Percy and Mr. Denham underwrite it. But to this department, which has been brought up in a world of hot revolvers, thugs and scabrous speech, the "Ladies in Retirement" method seems too well-bred. The leisurely tempo of the narrative, which would make a normal person's flesh creep, seems pleasantly boring to nerves that were shattered by "The Bat" untold centuries ago and by "Double Door" within the memory of living man. If murder is as soothing as this, what's all the shooting for?

As the producer, Gilbert Miller has as usual looked after all the details with the greatest of ease. He has engaged Raymond Sovey to design a sepulchral living-room for the obsequies, and persuaded Helene Pons to dress every one appropriately. Miss Robson is a tall lady of quality, with an excellent voice and a pleasantly reserved personality. Whatever Ellen Creed requires, Miss Robson delivers with the poise of a superior-actress, leaving a respectful theatregoer hoping to see her in an active part some day.

Patrick O'Moore plays a cheerfully treacherous little monster with considerable inventive skill. Estelle Winwood pops her eyes and undulates to some good purpose in the part of a Creed touched in the head, and Jessamine Newcombe trails garlands with daft complaisance as a third sister partly unhinged. Florence Edney and Evelyn Ankers complete a singularly well-behaved cast. To judge by the shuddery attentiveness of the audience this department ought to be more grateful.



# "Liliom"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, March 26, 1940

## "Liliom" Is Revived at 44th St. With New Setting and New Cast

"Liliom," tragi-comedy by Ferenc Molnar. Revised by Vinton Freedley at the 44th St. Theatre, New York, March 25, 1940.



By BURNS MANTLE

VINTON FREEDLEY has given Ferenc Molnar's "Liliom," which is that popular author's most popular play, a new setting and a new cast in his revival at the 44th St. theatre, opening last night.

And with the new setting and new cast has come a different atmosphere from that which we were made conscious, first by the Theatre Guild in 1921 and later by the Civic Repertory Theatre in 1932.

Both previous productions of the play were, it seemed, more in the continental spirit. Last night's revival bore unmistakably the suggestion of an American adaptation.

This may be because Burgess Meredith, playing the same part for the first time, gave the character of the Budapest "lily" a touch quite foreign to the Budapestian original.

### Scene and Cast

Or to the fact that the new production designed by Nat Karson suggests fresh verities. Or because the lighting by the same authority is crudely revealing rather than imaginatively dimmed. Even Heaven took on too positive a heavenly blue last night.

It happens that I never have been one of the "Liliom" fanatics. Being a literal person, the play always has been a sort of mixed grill to me. A fantastic affair of brilliant moments and artificial stretches.

Like its first Hungarian audiences, the

Guild's production left me confused and uncertain. Then some knowing one explained to me that Herr Molnar was trying to show that love could take a beating and still be happy; that blows struck by lovers were never really felt by the emotionally anesthetized recipient.

Enriched by this explanation I read a little more satisfaction into the Eva LaGallienne revival eight years ago. Even then the glamour of Joseph Schildkraut's Liliom eluded me, though I have always been conscious of his brilliant technical equipment. And Miss Eva's patient and dumb Julie was always a bit more irritating than emotionally satisfying.

### Miss Bergman's Debut

Last night it seemed to me that Ingrid Bergman, pretty Swedish motion picture ac-

trix, making her American stage debut in the role, was the warmest and most satisfying of the Julies, and the least peasant-like in the type.

And that Burgess Meredith was a Liliom who swaggered and was emotionally detached in his first scene, movingly genuine in his last scene, but never quite true through the play's middle episodes.

So I suppose I will have to go on awaiting a perfect casting and a perfectly directed performance of this play that has won so wide popularity the world around.

It happens that Mr. Molnar is visiting us at the moment. It seems quite reasonable that Mr. Freedley should have had him in to make suggestions about the staging, which is credited to Benno Schneider. I hope not. I should like to believe he could have helped it more.

There are compensating virtues. It is nice to have Miss Bergman about. She is honest and sensitive and carefully schooled. It is also pleasant to have a believable, if somewhat too flashy, Mrs. Muskat in Ann Mason.

And it is fun to discover that John Emery has a comedy sense, John giving a grand touch of caricature to Wolf Beifeld.

Elia Kazan, a solid young character actor, is a little swallowed up by the role of the Sparrow. Helen Shields does much for Maria. Joseph Macauley dutifully plays a couple of policemen, and Arnold Korff gives another artistic bit as the heavenly magistrate.

Last night's Easter Monday audience was large and properly responsive. If Mr. Molnar was present no one pointed him out to me. I might have got his autograph.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, March 26, 1940

## Liliom's Return

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

MOLNAR'S celebrated fantasy, "Liliom," which was one of the Theatre Guild's most famous successes, remains after all of these years a touching and imaginative play. With Burgess Meredith in the title role created in this vicinity by Joseph Schildkraut, and Miss Ingrid Bergman, of Sweden and the cinema, in the part played by Miss La Gallienne, Vinton Freedley's new production of the 1921 hit re-creates the quality of a curiously charming work with spirit and color. At the end of the first act this report would perhaps not have been so favorable, for Mr. Meredith did not seem at his best as the bumptious, worthless barker of the Budapest amusement park and the movement of the drama seemed rather desultory. The second half of the production, however, moves with far greater effectiveness and Mr. Meredith plays the Liliom of the final scenes at the top of his great skill, with the result that the Freedley revival can be recommended heartily.

Since the play is still fairly familiar to theatregoers, it might be well for me to change the usual order of my reviewing and speak first of the players. Actors who appear in revivals of great successes must always face the handicap of being compared to phantoms. It is not so much the spectators' actual recollections of the performances of the original cast as their dream memories of them which must be combated, and Mr. Meredith and Miss Bergman are confronted by the great task of equaling, not flesh-and-blood portrayals, but nostalgic idealizations

of the past. I think both of them come out of the ordeal with credit. As I have said, Mr. Meredith seemed rather uncertain about his characterization in the first section of the play, and then rallied handsomely in the final act. It is hard to imagine the episode of Liliom's meeting with the Police Magistrate of Heaven and of his pathetic return to earth for a day being more movingly played. As for Miss Bergman, she brings a fresh, clean quality to the theatre that is entirely charming, and she plays with grace and forthright honesty.

Strangely, it is Elia Kazan who is the least effective member of the current cast. Mr. Kazan is a vital and vivid actor at all times and his skill here does not entirely fail him, but he is not nearly as successful as Mr. Meredith and Miss Bergman in combating the memory of his predecessor. Dudley

Digges's portrayal of Liliom's companion in crime, the Sparrow, had an uncanny, evil quality that Mr. Kazan never manages to capture. There are, however, other good performances. Miss Helen Shields as the heroine's romantic friend, John Emery as the friend's stuffy sweetheart, the attractive Miss Joan Tetsel as Liliom's daughter, Arnold Korff as the Magistrate, Miss Ann Mason as Madame Muskat, Liliom's formidable ex-mistress and Miss Margaret Wycherly as the heroine's aunt are all properly helpful. Of course, though, it is Mr. Meredith and Miss Bergman who are of first importance, and it is a pleasure to greet both of them. I hope Miss Bergman does not rush back to Hollywood too soon.

As for the play, one of the most pleasant things you can say of it is that it is a fantasy wherein you do not have to be bothered with tracking down allegorical import. It is simply to be accepted as a fresh and moving romantic play. Only for newcomers it is necessary to state that "Liliom" is the tale of a stubborn young bad man of Budapest, who is loved by a simple serving girl, dies in the attempted commission of a robbery, is sentenced to sixteen years in purgatory and then is given a day on earth to show his repentance by one kind act. He is a graceless fellow, more violent and pique than evil, who slaps the girl he loves merely because he knows she is in the right and that he has no answer for her. Sixteen years in purgatory do not quite destroy the stubbornness of his spirit, so that even then he cannot resist slapping his daughter in desperation as he sees his chance for that one good deed being taken from him. It is strange how touching the story of this violent young scapegrace and his loyal wife can be, and it is a great tribute to Molnar, who has combined fantasy with realism amid so much romantic effectiveness.

# "Liliom"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, March 26, 1940

## Ferenc Molnar's 'Liliom' Is Revived at the Forty-fourth Street

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THE years have been kind to "Liliom," which Vinton Freedley revived last evening at the Forty-fourth Street. Nineteen of them have dripped away since the Guild first presented Ferenc Molnar's compassionate study of his amusement park tough, who had two chances to be kind and missed them both, and the dripping of years wears away most plays. But the vitality remains in "Liliom," and the imagination and perceptive tenderness.

Burgess Meredith plays the title role in the new production, and plays it with a fine swagger and with a quality of warmth and understanding beneath the swagger. Ingrid Bergman of the movies plays Liliom's girl, the unhappy Julie who got nothing but blows and harshness from her lover and had the ability to see through all that and understand a little of what he might have said if he had had any of the words to say it with. She acts the part quietly and sometimes lets her playing drift into monotone, but if she keeps the motion of the part a little too muted, she also keeps it real.

Both of them, and the others in the cast, open the way for the quality of the play to come through. And it is quite a play, still, especially in the later scenes. At the start it is rather hurried and Mr. Molnar leaves a lot to the actors. But once the story reaches Liliom's robbery attempt with the inimitable Ficzur, the feeling deepens and the writing takes on substance. Then Molnar approached the scenes he was writing the play for. Liliom is hustled off by heavenly policemen

to a heavenly police court, you remember, and put in the dock to explain his suicide. And when he is stubborn still, and almost too much even for heavenly patience in his intransigent determination to be himself, they open the doors of purgatory and show him in. He borrows a cigarette from the court clerk, cocks his cap, turns up the collar of his skimpy coat, and swaggers into inferno, still Liliom and proud of it.

The courtroom scene and the wryly comic scene of his return to earth years later give the play, I suppose, the quality which has enabled it to resist the erosion of the years. Mr. Meredith's performance—which I cannot compare with that of Joseph Schildkraut in 1921 for the best of reasons—underlines the quality in the present revival. Coming back to the stage after a rather long absence, and coming back a bit stockier, Mr. Meredith acts with tremendous vitality and assurance,

### 'LILIOM'

A play in a prologue and two acts by Ferenc Molnar; adapted by Benjamin Glazer; staged by Benno Schneider; settings, costumes and lighting by Nat Karson; incidental music by Deems Taylor. Presented at the Forty-fourth Street Theater on March 25, 1940, by Vinton Freedley. The cast:

|                                     |                                           |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Marie.....                          | Helen Shields                             |
| Julie.....                          | Ingrid Bergman                            |
| Mrs. Muskat.....                    | Ann Mason                                 |
| Liliom.....                         | Burgess Meredith                          |
| Beatrice Pearson                    |                                           |
| Four Servant Girls.....             | Elaine Perry<br>Evelyn Moser<br>Jane Amar |
| Policemen.....                      | Joseph Macaulay<br>Howard Freeman         |
| Mother Hollunder.....               | Margaret Wycherly                         |
| Suburban Policeman.....             | Ella Kazan                                |
| Young Hollunder.....                | Frank Vincent                             |
| Wolf Belfeld.....                   | Kenneth Bates                             |
| Linsman.....                        | John Emery                                |
| First Mounted Police.....           | Joseph Kramm                              |
| Second Mounted Police.....          | Francis De Sales                          |
| The Doctor.....                     | Lee Bergman                               |
| The Carpenter.....                  | Chat Hree                                 |
| First Policeman of the Beyond.....  | Gibbs Penrose                             |
| Second Policeman of the Beyond..... | Joseph Macaulay                           |
| Richly Dressed Man.....             | Francis De Sales                          |
| Poorly Dressed Man.....             | Howard Freeman                            |
| The Old Guard.....                  | Richard Mackay                            |
| The Magistrate.....                 | R. Henry Handon                           |
| Louise.....                         | Arnold Korff                              |
|                                     | Joan Tetzel                               |

and that the same time subtly. Miss Bergman gives a gentle charm; Ella Kazan has a few brilliant moments as Ficzur; John Emery and Helen Shields make capital of the roles of the substantial Biefelds and Margaret Wycherly, Arnold Korff and Ann Mason play excellently in lesser roles. Takes the season out of the doldrums, this sort of thing does.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, March 26, 1940

## Burgess Meredith and Ingrid Bergman in a Revival of Ferenc Molnar's 'Liliom'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IN case you remember "Liliom" as one of the most beautiful plays of our time you need not revise your opinion now. It was revived again last evening at the Forty-fourth Street Theatre with Burgess Meredith and Ingrid Bergman in the principal parts, and an entirely fresh production designed by Nat Karson and directed by Benno Schneider. Nothing but the play is as theatregoers remember it from 1921 when the Guild first put it on here, or from 1932 when Eva La Gallienne revived it. Some of the current revival improves on its predecessors; some of it is distinctly inferior. But that is neither here nor there. For the main point is that "Liliom" is still strange, original and deeply moving—Molnar in his finest imaginative vein.

Being wholly original, it falls into none of the easy categories where the drama is usually stored away. But it begins gayly with a memorable prologue beside a Hungarian carousel and then slips quietly into a story of love between a swaggering ruffian and an undistinguished little servant girl whose pride is less showy than his but equally stubborn. Like a born dramatist, Molnar draws simple characters with enviable grace and sees the world through their eyes humorously.

And, like a prose poet, he creates in Liliom a character of such memorable consistency that he treats the police magistrate in heaven with a proud man's disdain. Liliom even steals a star out of heaven to delight the little orphan he has left on earth, committing

a felony out of sheer kindness. Since no moral is intended in this touching fantasy, it is idle to attempt to draw one now. But perhaps there is no harm in remarking that those who love each other do not hurt each other in "Liliom," although one of them cuffs and slaps like the commonest bully.

In the two previous performances Joseph Schildkraut played Liliom with a good deal more arrogance than Mr. Meredith can manage. There was a cutting scorn in the Schildkraut swag. He was more theatrical and the early scenes in the play were crisper on that account. But Mr. Meredith is the better actor of the two. When the play goes deeper into the spirit of the character in the second of the two acts Mr. Meredith is the actor who can pull it out and put the torment on the stage. When Liliom is up against a real test

of character before the celestial magistrate Mr. Meredith is in superb form. His swagger is genuine; it arises from real strength of mind and spirit, and since it is obviously doomed it is profoundly moving. When the part meets him half-way Mr. Meredith can act it like a thoroughbred.

The part of Julie introduces us to a young actress of extraordinary gifts and ability. Ingrid Bergman comes from Stockholm. Although she recently appeared in the screen play "Intermezzo," this is her first appearance on the English-speaking stage. She has a slight accent. She also has a clear-cut beauty of figure and manner, responsive eyes, a sensitive mouth, a pleasant voice that can be heard and modulated. And more than that, she seems to have complete command of the part she is playing. Although Julie is shy and somewhat taciturn, Miss Bergman keeps the part wholly alive and lightens it from within with luminous beauty.

As "The Sparrow" Ella Kazan's craven stealthiness is amusing, although it does not quite match the slipperiness of Dudley Digges's acting. Ann Mason is a gandy Mrs. Muskat that suits the part perfectly. As Marie, the friend of Julie, Helen Shields acts with a kind of shining innocence. Excepting for a hokum entrance, John Emery plays the part of Wolf, the porter, with delightful tactfulness. Arnold Korff's magistrate has considerable warmth of dignity and a kindness that is not cloying. Margaret Wycherly's peevish aunt and Joseph Macaulay's policeman round out an excellent cast whom Mr. Schneider has directed with complete knowledge of the play and the stage.

"Liliom" is a designer's holiday—colorful, unacknowledged and in part fantastic. In the railroad track scene Mr. Karson begins with fantasy before the play needs it, but otherwise he has designed and lighted the production with great freedom of imagination and dressed it in costumes that admirably suit it. Molnar wrote "Liliom" about thirty years ago. It has had loyal friends in this country for almost twenty. It is still one of the most beautiful plays in the modern theatre.

# "Liliom"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, March 26, 1940

## Burgess Meredith Seen in A Revival of "Liliom"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

ONE of the glowing memories cherished by playgoers of a fortunate vintage is "Liliom" as, with Eva La Gallienne and Joseph Schildkraut, it was given a fine production by the Theatre Guild in 1920. That memory has outlasted Miss La Gallienne's unhelpful revival of eight years back when down at the Civic Repertory Mr. Schildkraut shamelessly overplayed a part he had once acted up to perfection. It will outlast even the shoddy performance to which Molnar's tragedy-comedy was exposed last night.

It was with high hopes that a large audience gathered in the all too-spacious depths of the 44th Street last evening. Burgess Meredith, Ingrid Bergman, Arnold Korff, and Elia Kazan were among the actors slated to appear. Vinton Freedley, an astute and successful provider of musical comedies, was to make his debut as a serious producer. And the text of his choice was a script which, though written and produced in Budapest thirty-one years ago, remains to this day in the library not only the best of its author's works but one of the most touching romances the modern theatre has yielded.

### Mr. Meredith's Liliom

But to sense the real virtues of "Liliom" at the 44th Street, to grasp the genuine delicacy of its imagination, to feel the richness of its simplicity, to respond to the beauty of its understatement, or to surrender to the pathos of its saga of how two young people—a barker at a carousel and his servant girl—wife—are bruised by love and life because

they are at once too mute and reticent to confess their love, it is necessary to guess at virtues which the performance, only occasionally makes clear.

Although Mr. Meredith can be an excellent actor, he is not a happy choice for Liliom. He catches the tough side of Molnar's barker graphically enough in a Sumner Theatre way. His face is interesting to watch. He has an uncommonly good voice. And he can claim his touching moments, as, for example, during the scene in heaven, when he hears to his sorrow that his unborn child is to be a daughter.

But his Liliom stops short with his reform school toughness. As a Budapest swaggerer Mr. Meredith looks like a jockey drawn by Cruikshank. He is hardly the romantic continental figure with whom to Mrs. Muskat's rage all the girls at her carousel fall in love. His deep-seated affection for Julie is some-

thing he fails to convey. Moreover he takes time off to indulge in some byplay such as his lighting of his cigarette before his entrance into hell which can only be described as being woeful in its over-deliberation.

### A Disappointing Revival

Ingrid Bergman is charming to look at as Julie. She has a nice quality and can act well. Still one misses in her, as in Mr. Meredith, that burning, smothered passion which smoldered between Miss La Gallienne's Julie and Mr. Schildkraut's Liliom. Miss Bergman fails to endow her love for Liliom and her power to treasure even his blows with the wan quality of abnegation for which the text calls and which is the source of much of its tenderness. Then, too, her make-up does not help. She is so ruddy, well-fed, and apple-cheeked throughout that it is hard to believe in the passive proofs of Julie's devotion.

Elia Kazan, usually an admirable actor, seems totally out-of-place and ill-at-ease as Sparrow, that deceitful, ever-vanishing and shy old codger that Dudley Digges made unforgettable in a glorious performance which managed to be even spiritually dusty. The truth is that if Ann Mason's Muskat is a pale unreality compared to Helen Westley's blown-blown harridan, if one misses and sadly misses Hortense Alden's metallic chirpings as Marie; if even so shrewd a performer as Arnold Korff muffs the magistrate in heaven; and the evening's one completely satisfying characterization is the richly grotesque and surprising one John Emery gives as Wolf, the reason is that Molnar's script and Mr. Freedley's actors have to contend at almost every moment not only against the odds of Benno Schneider's slow-paced and inept direction but also against the handicap of Nat Karson's poor lighting and undistinguished settings.

If "Liliom" seems thin and sometimes dullish at the 44th Street, make no mistake about it: Molnar's play remains an uncommonly good play. The only trouble is that its present production comes not as a triumph for Mr. Freedley in 1940 but as a triumph for the Guild in 1920.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, March 26, 1940

## Molnar's Liliom Is Revived With a Fresh Brilliance

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

IT IS difficult to believe that Ferenc Molnar, the distinguished Hungarian playwright, wrote his masterpiece Liliom more than 30 years ago, in the light of the fresh brilliance it seems to acquire in the beautifully expert hands of Burgess Meredith and Miss Ingrid Bergman, and in the rich production of it offered at the 44th Street Theater by Vinton Freedley.

Mr. Molnar, who has never before seen one of his plays on the American stage, was in last night's audience and he may well have rejoiced—with all of us—at the public reception of this revival.

The brightness of this new Liliom brings with it only one disheartening thought, and that is that it casts into even deeper shadow than ever the unfortunate theatrical experiences of the last two or three months. It is not a comfortable idea that we should have to go back a generation to find something to cheer.

Least this, however, be regarded as dampening the enjoyment of a play which is old yet seems new, I hasten to say that no such disturbing thought comes to mind during the seven scenes in which Mr. Meredith plays Mr. Molnar's gamin and Miss Bergman lives the part of Liliom's wife. Mr. Meredith has not

only extracted all the humor and pathos from the Molnar lines and turned it to account, but he has added to it. His performance is bold, impudent and sharp. It is also infinitely tender, and it suggests, rather than realizes, the pathetic depths of the love that so puzzles and bewilders the unfortunate young scamp. Liliom's character remains, as it has been ever since Molnar created it, one of the most fascinating in the modern theater. Liliom is Victor Hugo's Gavroche—grown a little older; a satiated and bedraggled soul which somehow remains clean; sentimentality cloaked in a hard shell of brazen pretense; great-heartedness masquerading as tough-

ness. His impudence is of the quality that makes you weep. He thumbs his nose at the world because he can think of no other way of demonstrating his superiority to it. Heaven's justice is, to him, a sort of magistrate's court, and in it he can be counted upon neither to lose his aplomb nor to lower his dignity by cringing. He is incorrigible—and faithful—to the end.

There is a certain peasant freshness about Miss Bergman's performance that instantly captures your sympathy, and there is a dignity and power in the more emotional scenes that wins your profound respect as well.

As acting background for these superlative performances, Mr. Freedley has provided a splendid supporting cast. Elia Kazan, the well-known Group Theater player, comes over in the role of Ficsur, the Sparrow. Ann Mason plays the part of the vixenish Mrs. Muskat. Helen Shields is seen as the giggling and vapid Marie. John Emery, after flitting about Broadway in deeply tragic or tragically serious roles, is delightful as the overstuffed Wolf Beifeld.

Mr. Kazan's interpretation of Ficsur, however, is somewhat puzzling to this reviewer. Acknowledging the truth that there is comedy in this role, it seems to me that some of the sinister aliveness and cunning of the man is lost in the broad strokes with which Mr. Kazan plays it. And his duel at cards with the dumb Liliom was enacted too rapidly to be believable. But perhaps Mr. Kazan (or Director Benno Schneider) is right, and Ficsur is not the smooth mountebank I had always pictured him. If so, my apologies for having brought the matter up in the first place.

Nat Karson's settings and his vivid costuming deserve special commendation. This revival of Liliom, in short, deserves to do well. It is a fine, a moving, a delightful play. It is warm and full of life and color. And it is superbly played.



# "A Case of Youth"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, March 25, 1940

## 'A Case of Youth,' Slight Case of Comedy, Opens at the National

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THE theater is prodigal of its authors. It uses up three, for example, in the composition of "A Case of Youth," which floated wistfully onto the stage of the National Theater Saturday evening and fluttered gently there for an hour or two. One author should have been enough for "A Case of Youth," or even part of an author. It is alarming to think that Wesley Townner, Ludwig Hirschfeld and Eugene Wolf all had hands in it, and hard to imagine how they found the room.

The three of them certainly were unable to think of much play. Their plot concerns a chipper maiden who comes from Switzerland to join her father in New York and

finds her father in a bad way. Musical comedy creditors besiege him and he has been doing a little mannerly theft of securities, which seems to imply jail. An older daughter, half-sister to the Swiss maiden, has her mind only on her men and so it is up to little Midge to set things right. A large, reserved dog accompanies Midge and surveys the audience with rather grieved dignity. This, it clearly thinks, is a pretty silly business for a big dog.

The dog, which is allied Mimsie, is quite right. Midge—I hope I'm keeping these characters reasonably straight—sell's father's

furniture to pay his debts and borrows \$10,000 from a nice young man to keep him out of jail. She falls girlishly in love with the nice young man, after a gently amusing scene in a hotel room when she nervously suspects seduction where none is intended. It's all extremely flimsy and subdued and the authors were mistaken in believing that they had enough comedy for a three-act play. They have, to be exact, enough comedy for a sixth of a three-act play, and this works out, I believe, to an eighteenth of a

### 'A CASE OF YOUTH'

A comedy in three acts by Wesley Townner based on a play by Ludwig Hirschfeld and Eugene Wolfe; staged by Arthur Sircom; settings by A. A. Ostrander; incidental music by Dana Suesse; presented at the National Theater on March 23, 1940, by Courtney Burr. The cast:

|                 |                  |
|-----------------|------------------|
| Dobbs           | Frank McCormack  |
| Mrs. Watts      | Mary Sargent     |
| Carlo           | Bertram Thorn    |
| Diana           | Valerie Cossart  |
| Mr. Mayflower   | Arthur Margetson |
| Peter           | Richard Kendrick |
| Midge           | Ellen Schwanneke |
| Boomer          | Herbert Duffy    |
| Bessie          | Dorothy O'Hanlon |
| Mrs. Rosenkrans | Babette Feist    |
| Kline           | Guy J. Samsel    |
| Fish            | William Rees     |
| Mrs. Marrow     | Lalvie Brownell  |
| Clark           | J. Ascher Smith  |
| Politto         | Leo Badia        |
| Baxter          | Sey Bockler      |
| Mr. Pinkie      | Anne Gerlette    |
| Switters        | Bert Wilcox      |
| Walter          | Auguste Aramini  |

play per author. This is not using our authors to capacity.

Miss Ellen Schwanneke, a newcomer from Germany, is engaging in the role of Midge. Arthur Margetson attacks the part of her father cheerfully and with spirit. The cast manage not to stick their elbows through the gauzy fabric of the play, which is certainly all that any one could expect and more than the authors deserved.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, March 25, 1940

## "A Case of Youth" Seen at the National Theatre

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IN A moment of miscalculation, great enough in its proportions to woo the interest of Einstein and stimulate the curiosity of Mr. Morgenthau, Courtney Burr decided not only to assemble a company but to gather an audience at the National on Saturday night just as if "A Case of Youth" were really a comedy worthy of his or anyone else's attention.

The first premise of theatrical illusion is, of course, make-believe. Shakespeare's "imaginary puissance" and Coleridge's voluntary remission of judgment that what we are seeing is not real, are only different ways of saying the same thing; of reminding us (as if we needed reminding) that the theatre (which can be so magnificent when the plot works) is no more than a huge conspiracy, joyously entered into, of "let's pretend."

### The Uncomic Spirit

Unfortunately there are moments, painful and embarrassing, when even in the presence of the footlights pretense becomes impossible. As a matter of fact at least one hundred and twenty such illusionless minutes are all that "A Case of Youth" has to offer to audiences confronted with its two hours of impossible make-believe.

The program betrays its own doubts as to the merits of the script. It describes "A Case of Youth" as being "a comedy by Wesley Townner, based on a play by Ludwig Hirschfeld and Eugene Wolf." In other words, although there may have been a play in the beginning, the comedy that has been derived from it does not necessarily claim to be one. The wonder is that Mr. Burr, in whose debt we stand for such an uproarious production as "Sailor Beware!", should be bold enough to assert that Mr. Townner's text is even a comedy.

For three acts as unsmiling as the face of Hitler, memories of the winter at Valley Forge, or a collection of Bela Lugosi's passport photographs, it endeavors to chronicle the way in which a very young daughter of a financially embarrassed father managed to save her dad from the suite at Sing Sing which he richly deserves and into which he

would have been moved had she not raised the ten thousand dollars necessary to cover his misuse of an investor's stocks.

### But Why

The much-married father is pictured as being an impractical broker whose love for music exceeds his fondness for business. But inasmuch as his music sounds worse even than the reports of his financial transactions, he turns out to be a fellow who is far from endearing. The daughter who comes to his rescue is a Swiss Peg o' My Heart; a child he has not seen in years, who suddenly bobs up, accompanied by a huge mastiff, to put his house in order. Although very young and supposedly as cute as a litter of Shirley Temples, this child is represented as having the same precocious gift for finance that the mountain girls of Tennessee have shown for motherhood.

It is Ellen Schwanneke, a young actress with a distinguished record in Germany and Austria to her credit, who tries to meet all the Bergner-at-her-coyest demands of the Swiss daughter's part. Other players, such as Mary Sargent, Arthur Margetson, Valerie Cossart, and Richard Kendrick speak valiantly all the lines Mr. Townner has written down for them to say. And Mr. Ostrander has dressed the stage handsomely. But though all these good people act as if "A Case of Youth" must be served, they never manage to make clear to those of us waiting patiently for laughs out front just why this should be so.

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NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE  
March 25, 1940

## Very Little

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

ON THIS Easter Monday morning it is fitting that the kindest things possible be said, and so I should report immediately that there is a very handsome dog, a noble Great Dane, in the cast of "A Case of Youth," which opened at the National Theater Saturday night. This splendid animal captures my enthusiasm not only through his heroic presence, but chiefly because his attitude toward mankind seems to express all the lofty scorn that so many of us have been trying to get in our prose style for years and years. He merely came on stage, looked at the audience with profound contempt, yawned wearily and then turned his back on all of us, but he managed it with eloquence and completeness.

There is little else of an admiring nature to be said about "A Case of Youth." The latest production of a colorful gentleman of the theater, the good Commodore Burr, this feeble comedy has none of the excitement to offer that was to have been hoped for from the Commodore. It is about a dubious broker, who would rather play the piano and write symphonies than fleece his clients with dubious stocks, and how his daughter from Switzerland took over matters while her father was away and eventually straightened things out. It is all very dull and lacking in both invention and humor, and there is a scene, in which the naive heroine thinks she is going to be seduced in the Hotel Pierre, that sets new standards in lack of glamour. There is a character named Mrs. Watts, but the symbolism of her presence escapes me.

The leading role is ably played by Miss Ellen Schwanneke, a German exile who appeared in that celebrated film, "Mädchen in Uniform." The New York theater has not been very kind to her. Arthur Margetson plays the father with enthusiasm and gestures, and the other performers, do the best that they can. The whole performance offers one of those unhappy little adventures in ineptitude that insist on making playgoing one of the more hazardous experiences. That Great Dane, however, deserves better things, and so, for that matter, does the good Commodore. So, in truth, do the long-suffering drama-lovers.

# "A Case of Youth"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, March 25, 1940

## 'A Case of Youth' Is a Case of Arrested Theatre Development

"A Case of Youth" comedy adapted by Wesley Towner from the German of Hirschfeld and Wolf. Produced by Courtney Burr at the National Theatre, New York, March 23, 1940.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

TOO bad Ellen Schwanneke could not have had a better play in which to make her first New York appearance. She is an attractive little German actress of the Bergner type, undoubtedly capable of splendid performances in the right parts.

But as the mousey heroine of "A Case of Youth" at the National Theatre Saturday night Miss Schwanneke was smothered by one of those depressingly naive comedies in which a soubretteish person nibbles at masculine hearts until she gets herself a husband and a fortune.

Miss Schwanneke is credited with a bold experience in Germany. She had acquired considerable stage fame, according to the story of her friends, when she was distressed by the Hitler treatment of many of her fellow artists.

### In Switzerland

Rather than appear to endorse such goings on Miss Schwanneke prepared to leave. When Der Fuehrer invited her to a meeting of German artists in Munich she made a face

at him. And when a German picture company invited her to Berlin she made another. Then she hurried over to Switzerland and acted there until she could get an American visa. Arrived in this country she happened to meet a young man named William Castle, who ran last Summer's theatre at Stony Brook, Conn.

Mr. Castle offered her a part in a German piece he was doing called "Not for Children," if she would learn English. In four weeks, they say, Ellen was letter perfect. In five weeks she was the hit of the countryside.

### New Locale

Now "Not for Children" has become "A Case of Youth." It may have seemed like a perfect vehicle for the Schwanneke in Connecticut, but it was pretty silly in 41st St. Saturday night.

Miss Schwanneke pretended to be a playful child from Paris come to live with her papa in New York. Papa had left mamma. She found papa composing music like a stage genius and acquiring creditors like a fool.

The child took the situation in hand and in a trice, which was long enough to cover a champagne dinner in a young man's rooms at the Pierre, she had straightened the whole thing out.

A slightly bewildered cast includes Arthur Margetson, who is usually available when a piano has to be played on stage; Valerie Cosart, Richard Kendrick, Mary Sargent and Dorothy O'Hanlon, practically bursting with adolescence.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, March 25, 1940

## A Case of Youth, New Comedy at the National Theater

SAILORS, be wary. Even if the most nautical-minded of producers, Courtney Burr, seems to be far inland this time. A Case of Youth he delivered to the National Saturday night looks like prewar (1914-18) vintage just off the boat. The package is labeled plainly enough: A comedy by Wesley Towner, based on a play by Ludwig Hirschfeld and Eugene Wolf, which would indicate a blend of imported and domestic.

So sailors, be wary. Even a nonconnoisseur could sniff the bouquet. It is a still wine, by the way. You can conclude that without half-trying, because it positively refuses to sparkle. A little froth on top, but that merely because the contents which have been resting uneasily on their side, are roughly shaken up while serving. The only giddiness it produces, we're afraid, is in the amiable actors that come with the new comedy.

But hyperbole to one side, this seems to be bottled substance that comes in three acts to A Case of Youth into the daffydill and expensive household of an insolvent money-maneuverer (who writes symphonies on the side) comes a Swiss miss who happens to be his daughter by Wife No. 2 or No. 3. She brings her Great Dane with her, a dog so huge as almost to crowd all the players off the stage and which as Danes go seemed more melancholy than the original. Or maybe, having had a look around at his surroundings, he knew that fate and the play were betraying him.

Anyway the little lady from the Swiss chalets (her name, by the way, is Midge and

her father's name is Mayflower, if you insist upon details), soon takes charge of the episode. Takes charge in fact, almost before the customs labels are dry. While various Mayflowers sail off on various week ends, mostly illicit ones, Midge sets about rectifying the financial problem. She satisfies a group of dimwit creditors and strips the house by auctioning off the furniture, then sups with a handsome benefactor in his Hotel Pierre suite, because he is getting the cash that will keep Mr. Mayflower out of jail. She manages to avoid seeing his etchings, incidentally, and everything else comes out all right, too. Another incidentally: The entire dinner service in Act II, Scene II, courtesy of the Hotel Pierre.

The little lady who does these droll and devilish things is portrayed by Ellen Schwanneke who received some notice hereabouts as the actress who refused Hitler's invitation to act for him in Berlin, a gesture which instantly won her the acclaim of a great many folk. It may be harsh to say so, but a few brutes Saturday night argued der Fuehrer didn't know what he was doing. It must be she is somewhat at a disadvantage in a role which you usually would expect to be filled by Deanna Durbin, when such plots are recorded with cinematic skill, and her struggles in English as a spoken tongue still are painfully coy. The others of the cast remain as cheerful as they possibly can under the circumstances, like Arthur Margetson, who seems to be well aware of the difficulties he is in; Richard Kendrick, the young lifesaver of the plot line, and Valerie Cosart. It's our notion that the Great Dane was the most dignified and poised member of the troupe. In instances like these A Case of Youth doesn't measure up to even a full cavalcade.

GEORGE ROSS

Reprinted from  
NEW YORK TIMES  
March 25, 1940

## 'A Case of Youth'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

AMONG the less voluble characters in "A Case of Youth," which was played at the National Saturday evening, there is a noble Great Dane. Physically he is probably the most powerful creature on the stage. Personally he is grave, patient and detached. Although he is willing to do whatever the play requires him to do, his attitude is one of mature distaste for the incomprehensible behavior of human beings. Nothing this column can say about Wesley Towner's play can be half so rebuking as the Great Dane's well-bred disinterest in the silliness of the plot and the hackneyed restlessness of the performance.

Mr. Towner's comedy is based on a play by Ludwig Hirschfeld and Eugene Wolf. It is the story of a simple little girl who, by telling the truth, shames the devils of worldly society and saves them from destruction. Her father, a singularly feeble-minded investment banker, has pledged \$10,000 of a customer's securities and will go to jail in the morning if he cannot return them. Little Midge puts everything right for him.

Although she is obviously an angel of mercy in a craven world, it would give an audience some worldly satisfaction to see her get a whale of a beating at one time or another. For the mawkish sentimentality of the plot is well nigh intolerable in adult society. And Ellen Schwanneke's precocious acting of the part is equally unpalatable. Arthur Margetson is present as a fumbling, addle-witted financier. Stale and mechanical in plot, the play has been subjected to direction that wallows in cliché. Great Danes are wonderful dogs.

# "Separate Rooms"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, March 25, 1940

## "Separate Rooms" New Farce at Maxine Elliott's

By WILELLA WALDORF

ALAN DINEHART, Glenda Farrell, Lyle Talbot and several of their associates on the screen returned to the Broadway stage last Saturday evening in a farce entitled "Separate Rooms," revealed at Maxine Elliott's Theatre. During its recent tryout tour, the play was called "Thanks for My Wife" and a program note states that "Separate Rooms" is controlled by Thanks for My Wife, Inc., of Hollywood, California.

It took four authors, including Mr. Dinehart, to whip "Separate Rooms" into shape, and last Saturday's opening performance gave the impression that strenuous efforts have been made to modernize something of the vintage of "Up in Mabel's Room" and "Getting Gertie's Garter" era. Mr. Dinehart, looking a little older, but still navigating the stage with good-natured assurance and even a certain jauntiness, has cast himself as New York's most widely syndicated columnist who is also a woman-hater. When his younger and more naive brother writes a play that unaccountably turns out to be a hit and proceeds to marry its star, the irate keyhole-peeper is restrained from revealing the lady's past in 500 newspapers only by the plea of his secretary (or Girl Friday) for a three-month armistice.

Discovering at the end of this period that his sister-in-law has all but ruined his brother financially, and insists, besides, upon being a wife in name only—a \$400 pedigreed Chihuahua is the only male permitted to enter her bedroom—the columnist decides not to print his accumulated evidence of a riotous past, but to blackmail the actress into becoming not only a Wife, but a Housewife.

There is even talk of a Baby.

Anybody who can't go on from here and predict the third act has obviously never experienced a farce of the choice "Separate

Rooms" vintage. Saturday night's audience was often in convulsions at the quips Mr. Dinehart and his three associate authors have devised. There were shrill squeals from the balcony, gruff guffaws from the orchestra section, and Tommy Manville sat in the front row. What more could wanderers from Hollywood ask?

Lyle Talbot wore spectacles and looked worried as the simple-minded playwright, and Glenda Farrell lent her blonde competence to the part of the actress with the past. Since a remarkable number of Miss Farrell's lines ended in "See?", she sounded a good deal like Diamond Lil much of the time. Jack Smart as a fat and bumptious butler exhausted this reviewer completely (and not from laughter). Mosele Britton (Mrs. Dinehart) had the thankless task of playing the columnist's Girl Friday, and Austin Fairman was back at his old trade as a wealthy man-about-town with an Oxford brogue. Madora Keene dropped in for a few moments along toward the end as a crackpot female out interviewing for the magazine, Household Hints, and the whole thing went on in an elegant penthouse setting, complete

### "SEPARATE ROOMS"

"SEPARATE ROOMS," a farce by Joseph Carole and Alan Dinehart, in collaboration with Alex Gottlieb and Edmund Joseph. Presented by Bobby Crawford last Saturday evening at Maxine Elliott's Theatre. Staged by William B. Friedlander.

#### THE CAST

|                |       |                |
|----------------|-------|----------------|
| Taggart        | ..... | Jack Smart     |
| Gary Bryce     | ..... | Austin Fairman |
| Don Stackhouse | ..... | Lyle Talbot    |
| Linda          | ..... | Mosele Britton |
| Scoop Davis    | ..... | James Robbias  |
| Pam            | ..... | Glenda Farrell |
| Jim Stackhouse | ..... | Alan Dinehart  |
| Leona Sharpe   | ..... | Madora Keene   |

with bar, that seemed familiar, but was credited to no specific designer in the program.

Mr. Dinehart and his confreres are not attempting to deceive anybody. "Separate Rooms" is just about what you'd expect from its name. If the title sounds alluring and the prospect of seeing a flock of Hollywood celebrities in the flesh, exciting, this is your dish.

Reprinted from

NEW YORK SUN, March 25, 1940

## "Separate Rooms"

### Alan Dinehart Returns in a New Farce

ALAN DINEHART, Glenda Farrell and Lyle Talbot, who have spent the last few weeks barnstorming their way east from Hollywood, have turned up at last in the Broadway sector. On the road and during their seven-week stay in Chicago, the vehicle in which they arrived here was known as "Thanks for My Wife," but it was rechristened "Separate Rooms," for its Saturday night premiere at Maxine Elliott's theater. We fear it needs far more, however, than just a new title to succeed, for this farce, which Mr. Dinehart and Joseph Carole have concocted with the help of Alex Gottlieb and Edmund Joseph, is at best a routine little play on the rowdy side, and its numerous authors have stuffed it nearly to the choking point with theatrical gags. Not all of them are fresh and quite a share of them are decidedly not for the squeamish, "Separate Rooms" not being just the right play to which to take maiden Aunt Bessie from Binghamton.

It discloses how Jim Stackhouse, the great New York columnist, gossip peddler and character assassin, blackmails a selfish and generally obnoxious young actress who has married his playwrighting younger brother, Don, into helping the young man attain the domesticity and fatherhood he so earnestly desires. The latter point, of course, paves the way for plenty of jests of a highly obnoxious nature. For a while during the latter part of the second act when big brother Jim takes over direction of the activities of the household, the play does reach a hilarious pitch, but by the final act, it has subsided again into a mere string of gags.

Mr. Dinehart, being both a personable player and one who knows his way around a stage, be the play good or bad, manages to make much of the play sound better than it really is in his portrayal of the columnist. The rest of the acting is only about as good as the play deserves. Certainly Miss Farrell added nothing to her stature as a player by the bolsters interpretation she gave of the actress Saturday night and Mr. Talbot, shouldered with the onerous task of playing the naive dramatist, succeeding not only in making the character a thorough going sap, but for the most part a dull one to boot.

The most disturbing thing about the whole proceeding is that we doubt if Mr. Dinehart who has been away in Hollywood now for six years, will be staying around very long in this one. We shall miss Mr. Dinehart when he departs; not so "Separate Rooms."

HERICK BROWN

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, March 25, 1940

## One Farce Comedy Idea Floors Four Authors

"Separate Rooms," farce by Joseph Carole, Alan Dinehart, Alex Gottlieb and Edmund Joseph, presented by Bobby Crawford at Maxine Elliott's Theatre, New York, March 25, 1940.

★ ★

By JOHN CHAPMAN

IT took four authors to think of a farce called "Separate Rooms" which opened Saturday night at Maxine Elliott's, and the most they managed to think of was a farce called "Separate Rooms."

One fancies that, working backward from the title and knowing they were doing a farce, Messrs. Carole, Dinehart, Gottlieb and Joseph must have decided that the separate rooms would have to be bedrooms or there wouldn't be any farce. And the people involved would have to be husband and wife or there wouldn't be any comedy sense in having separate bedrooms.

The plot? A hard-boiled actress marries the soft-boiled author of the hit she is in because she can play him for a chump, use all his money and have a good time on the side. But the soft-boiled author happens to have a hard-boiled brother who is a gossip columnist, and this gossip columnist has so much dirt on the actress that he can force her, on pain of exposure in print, to be a kind and loving wife.

Wife gives in and to nobody's surprise but her own she finds she enjoys being domestic. Get the columnist fixed up with his adoring secretary in the last act and you have the complete scenario.

There are fairly frequent funny lines, but most of them sound as though one of the collaborators had said, "This is a good gag."

Let's put it in here." The flow and the pace necessary to a light sex comedy are lacking. Lacking, too, is a rudimentary knowledge of the columning business. "How much time before deadline?" asks the paragrapher of his secretary—as if a man who didn't know what time his stuff was due would last long enough to draw a week's pay.

Glenda Farrell is blonde and brittle as the lass who has wifehood forced upon her. Alan Dinehart barks and shrugs and drives along at a good farcical pace as the columnist. Lyle Talbot plays a gentle male animal as the needful brother and Jack Smart takes it easy as a fat and saucy servant. But none of the characters is real enough to laugh about much. A modernistic living room set has a bar for frequent drinks.



# "Separate Rooms"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, March 25, 1940

## Separate Rooms Gets Cast Mostly from Hollywood

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

**T**HERE is a decided odor of Hollywood in and around the Maxine Elliott Theater, where Bobby Crawford presented, Saturday night, a comedy called *Separate Rooms* and featuring Alan Dinehart, Glenda Farrell and Lyle Talbot.

In the first place, the playwright department has a roster of four names, the dramatic quadruplets responsible for the work being Mr. Dinehart himself, Joseph Carole, Alex Gottlieb and Edmund Joseph. In the second place, the setting—a New York penthouse—is the best thing in the show, yet the designer gets no credit at all in the program. In the third place, the cast is drawn almost entirely from the films, from Mr. Dinehart and Miss Farrell, who has appeared in nearly 40 pictures in the past five years, to Mr. Talbot, who has appeared in 30 pictures, and James Robbins, who has flitted from Warner's to Universal to Columbia.

Also in the cast is Jack Smart, who has been on the screen for many years, and who

boasts the dubious distinction of being a radio comedian as well.

Given the cast history of this troupe, then, it is not difficult to imagine the result. *Separate Rooms* seems to be a mildly amusing

B picture which somehow or other has strayed into legitimate circles. Why the escape from Hollywood, I don't know, unless it is that Mr. Hayes might have frowned at one or two of the situations, and certainly would not have approved of one or two of the lines.

Yet the play, it must be admitted in all honesty, does have some cleverly invented situations and a number of lines that bring laughter to an audience. Its fault is that while the story might be told plausibly in the movies, bulwarked by the realism of that medium, it is wholly unbelievable when it is recited, in one setting on the stage.

The quadruplet authors establish as their heroine a flighty, egotistic, selfish, gold-digging and fatuous actress, who is married to a strangely blind and mild-mannered young playwright. The playwright's brother, a columnist patterned (you guessed it) after Walter Winchell, threatens to expose the bride's lurid past unless she mends her ways, stops gadding about with playboys, stops spending money for diamonds and Mexican sea-bonds and accords her husband the customary rights of a consort.

The actress, considerably in a stew lest her career be ruined, becomes unwillingly domesticated and in the process actually falls in love with her husband. And, while wishing the young couple well, I, for one, cannot see what either one of them saw in the other in the first place.

*Separate Rooms* will offer no competition to the other plays on Broadway. And it won't hurt the World's Fair.

Reprinted from  
NEW YORK TIMES  
March 25, 1940

## Through the Keyhole

**O**UT in Chicago, where they gave it a shakedown run, it was called "Thanks for My Wife." This being Broadway, where allusions must learn to stand on their own feet, they have pointed it up to "*Separate Rooms*," and as such Maxine Elliott's received it on Easter's Eve. With a cast composed mainly of folk from the Hollywood lots, it continues as a tale of the columnist, his secretary, his brother, the actress the latter marries, the butler and the dog. Oh, yes: the set is a penthouse living room, and on the left is a door leading into one bedroom, on the right is a door leading into another bedroom. A bar is near the center. Columnists drink.

Alan Dinehart, in there battling as both co-author and actor, is the proprietor of the keyhole stand, sour but with a heart of gold, in love but not knowing he is in love—until the last, when the author whispers to the actor that the curtain had better come down. Lyle Talbot is the brother, playing the role of a mild playwright-husband much as Mr. Nugent pursues the Nugent-Thurber muse in "The Male Animal." For looks they give you Glenda Farrell, which is all right. And for dialogue—well, the Easter season is upon the world, even to Thirty-ninth Street, and if you happen to like the joke the boys are telling you will get a nice dirty laugh, and in any case at all you probably would like most of the second act. They did Saturday, anyway.

The tale, in the fashioning of which Mr. Dinehart was aided and abetted by Joseph Carole, opens with the creation of a new star in a work by a new playwright, the pair of them thereupon deciding to get married. The brother who writes for the mass circulation papers, thinks this is bad, very bad, but the Girl Friday persuades him to lay off a time and give marriage a chance. So what? The marriage turns out O. K. and the master, himself, is lured at the end into a union with the G. F. The luring is through false charges of approaching paternity, but columnists have to expect that. So, as a matter of fact, does anyone who has seen the earlier reaches of "*Separate Rooms*."

L. N.

Reprinted from  
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE  
March 25, 1940

## 'Separate Rooms'

Farce by Carole, Dinehart,  
Gottlieb and Joseph

**M**ESSRS. Dinehart, Carole, Gottlieb and Joseph, collaborators on the farce "*Separate Rooms*," are a bit slow in setting up the pins of their premise, but when they get around to knocking them over, the four-man writing (or bowling) team comes pretty close to making a strike. In the first act they seriously and slowly start to tell the story of an ambitious actress who marries the author of her successful play in order to further her ambitions. After that, with the exception of one or two dull stretches, the playwrights proceed to push the plot around in the best George Abbott tradition.

A newspaper columnist hopes to marry off an actress to a rich man-about-town by arranging to have her star in a play written by his brother. The play, he believes, is so bad that she will have to give up her stage career for matrimony. When the work turns out to be a success, the actress marries the columnist's brother to insure her career in the theater. Disapproving of the marriage, the columnist at first attempts to break up the union, but finally sets about making his brother happy by threatening to expose the actress's past unless she settles down and becomes a good wife. He succeeds.

Thanks to the expert direction of William B. Friedlander and Alan Dinehart's make-believing as the columnist, the farce turns out to be a more amusing play than the synopsis of the plot would indicate.

Glenda Farrell and Lyle Talbot, refugees from Hollywood at the moment, lend themselves readily to the complexities of the plot. Jack Smart, as the butler, does more than his share to keep that tedious first act from falling flat. The balance of the cast does what is expected of them with reserve. Overlook the first act; the second and third are fun.

J. F.

## These Are But a Few of the Many Subscribers to Critics' Theatre Reviews

### SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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University of Maine  
University of Michigan  
University of Oklahoma  
University of Pennsylvania  
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Allentown Call-Chronicle  
Memphis Commercial Appeal  
Hartford Courant  
San Francisco Chronicle

### LITTLE THEATRES

Cedar Falls Players (Iowa)  
Chicago Workshop Theatre  
Le Petit Theatre du Vieux Carre  
Indianapolis Civic Theatre  
Richmond Little Theatre  
Pasadena Playhouse

# Theater of the Piccoli

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, March 22, 1940

## 'Theater of the Piccoli,' the Puppet Revue, Opens at the Majestic

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

VITTORIO PODRECCA'S "Theater of the Piccoli," the puppet revue, returned to New York last evening at the Majestic and the incredibly manipulated ladies and gentlemen of wood hung by their toes from slack wires, sang arias and lost their heads in gymnastic excitement. They have changed their performance in details, but essentially they are the same gay wooden people they were on their last visit some years ago. Not a day older, most of them.

Their versatility is amazing. Some of them can fly into pieces and reassemble themselves in midair and never lose a stop of their dancing measures. A number

of the smaller ones in a Cinderella fantasy—which is just a little too long, while we're on the subject—have lights in their heads and can blink like fireflies. Any one of them can defy the laws of gravitation and their acrobatics are rare and wonderful. And about the whole performance there is the quality of gentle satire. In a kindly, amused fashion the wooden people burlesque the angularity and abruptness of the humans they mimic.

The Piccoli Pianist is still with them, for example, and still about the funniest performer on the bill. He is the most delicate and apt of the burlesques, free utterly from that overstrain which now and then is apparent in the work of some of the lesser performers. Even when he falls asleep on the piano, even when, as the soprano reaches for lost notes, he peers anxiously under the instrument in apparent search for a possible

### 'THEATER OF THE PICCOLI'

A puppet revue in two acts and thirteen scenes; devised by Vittorio Podrecca and offered at the Majestic Theater on March 21, 1940, by Cheryl Crawford. The singers are Augusto Galli, Agostino Guidi, Emma Lattuada, Lia Podrecca, Antonio Quaglia, Mario Seranelli, Alma Zatti, Irma Zappata and Dario Zani; the manipulators and operators are Gorno, Braga, Donati, Forgioli, Possidoni, Fefe, Borda, Gammonet and Ansaldo; settings by Bruno Angoletta; costumes by Caramba; prologue by Vittorio Podrecca.

cat, he satirizes with restraint. There are a pair of admirable acrobats, too, performing feats of levitation with every muscle quivering with anguish. The clowns are fine, and so are the monkeys and the gnomes, and there are three monstrous birds which defy description and are superbly grotesque.

It is hard to imagine how a single detail could be improved. But the entertainment as a whole could, I think, be improved by shortening. Two hours of puppets are a good many hours of puppets; the charms of such things is an evanescent one and not to be labored. It would be better to go away unsatisfied, not to have to pretend that even the most engaging of wooden people can satisfy through a full-length evening. Since the "Theater of the Piccoli" lives as a novelty in any case, it might risk being novel also in length and whittle its entertainment to an hour. But then maybe people wouldn't go, and that would be a pity because here is the very flower of puppethood and the gentlest of entertainments for those weary of the demands of the grown-up world.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, March 22, 1940

## Theatre of the Piccoli Seen at the Majestic

By JOHN MASON BROWN

"THIS calls for a celebration," cries Geppetto in Mr. Disney's film when Pinocchio ceases to be a wooden head and becomes a real boy. But precisely what kind of a celebration Geppetto would deem proper as a salute to the Theatre of the Piccoli raises a challenging question. For at the Majestic he would encounter a whole stageful of little wooden heads, almost all of whom seem human to those who survey them from out front.

Vittorio Podrecca has traveled far since his well-disciplined company captivated the town some seven years ago. The wires which operate his actors have been

functioning with a greater range than trans-Atlantic cables can boast. He has been to Europe, Africa, South America and Mexico, and now, with the influence of Latin America turning many of his players into exponents of the Good Neighbor policy, he is back again in New York. It is Cheryl Crawford who is presenting him. And for the first time his

extraordinarily gifted marionettes are to be seen locally at popular prices.

### Miraculous Marionettes

Signor Podrecca's company remains the last word in puppetry. Technically his marionettes are miraculous. They are brilliantly

manipulated, lavishly costumed, have alter egos with pleasant voices, and appear before effective backgrounds. Furthermore, when they put their strings to it, they can do almost anything. A jazz band offers them no difficulty. They are ready to oblige with anything from a xylophone to a drum.

They can produce Oomph girls with the same ease that they can turn out a Pagliacci, sing Massenet's "Cinderella," or do a rhumba. If it is Vienna that is wanted, they can glide to the melodies of Strauss with a Hapsburg ease worthy of one of Arthur Murray's graduates. They know their Hollywood stars, too, as their impersonators indicate, when they give their attention to such worthies as Charlie Chaplin, Garbo, and that West Horse Greeley did not have in mind.

Moreover the players of the Piccoli have admitted the animal kingdom to their human zoo. Monkeys are also in their crew; little monkeys of uncanny grace and charm.

### The Pianist Returns

Their vaudeville show likewise boasts two acrobats who prove to be body-snatchers of uncommon prowess. Fortunately—most fortunately, indeed—two old friends of Signor Podrecca's ensemble have not been worn out by their travels. One of these is BU-BU-BU, that daring young girl on the flying trapeze.

The other, as almost goes without saying, is the renowned Piccoli pianist, who in his own rights is enough to make attendance at the Majestic compulsory. He is up to his old tricks, this crotchety but irresistible musician, turning the pages of his score, throwing his hands around with an artist's frenzy, and staring suddenly with almost human eyes at the singers he accompanies.

Although one may wish the sketches were more diversified, and regret that the approach is not more sharply satiric, the cheering fact remains that Signor Podrecca's Theatre of the Piccoli is an organization which for the most part proves as gratifying as it is skillful.

# Theater of the Piccoli

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, March 22, 1940

## Vittorio Podrecca Brings Back the 'Theatre of The Piccoli' After Six Years in Other Lands

By BROOKS ATKINSON

**A**FTER an absence of six years Vittorio Podrecca has brought back the Piccoli for another visit to Manhattan. They clattered off a show at the Majestic last evening under Cheryl Crawford's management. In case you have forgotten, Signor Podrecca is the peripatetic puppeteer who tours all the nations, speaking almost any language with the assistance of a few puppet gestures of his own, and beaming fondly on audiences with the expansiveness of a good showman. He has no home life. During the last six years this office has received messages from the Piccoli from practically all the countries that were not at war for the moment—most recently from South America and Mexico. Wherever there is peace, lo, there is Podrecca among it. Some day when the seas lanes are safe he will return to Italy, where some hundreds of his puppets are lounging in a warehouse. Just now he has his cheerful eye fixed hopefully on the United States.

He is "proud" of his puppets, he says with his international accent. He may well be "proud" of the Piccoli pianist, who is a masterpiece. Ever since Podrecca's last visit this department has cherished the memory of that doll virtuoso who used to play here

with a soloist's temperament. Let it be said at once that the pianist has not lost skill during his barnstorming of the nations. He still bows with humble grace, attacks the keyboard with artistic passion, tosses back his coat-tails, turns the sheet music, stares disapprovingly into the vitals of his grand piano and holds the singers in disdain. No clumsy academician, he can play with one hand and beat his knees against the piano in the jazzy sequences. He is a perfect puppet. Mechanical at heart, he exudes personality.

Bill-bai-bul, the slack-wire performer, is also swinging recklessly and doing daring deeds of rhythm and balance. The strong man with the enormous chest expansion breathes with healthy gusto and performs impossible feats of lifting. Somewhere on his wanderings Signor Podrecca has acquired a pair of rumba dancers who are the hottest things this side of the Equator. Nothing in "The Peanut Vendor's" song is too torrid for the male dancer, whose legs, arms, shoulders, head and torso shake in a furious rhythm. When the female dancer went into her number last evening it was feared that the police might come in. She is too hot to handle. Insurance companies insist that she be packed in asbestos during the Piccoli travels.

Those are the best items in the show Podrecca's little people are offering now. There is one disadvantage in touring all nations. Podrecca has to confine his entertainment to things that do not depend on a language. Like a good Italian, he resorts to opera. His dolls are forever singing their heads off, and a little of this polite caterwauling goes a very long way. For ingenious though they are, the Piccoli are no better than the Metropolitan Opera Company, which is standard in these parts. Too much of the show is laboriously musical.

In this department's opinion, puppets are best when they satirize human beings, not when they mimic the art of human beings. It is not by accident that the pianist is the genius of the current entertainment. For he is witty in the medium of pantomime. All the puppets are interesting creations, and they are ingeniously manipulated. But while he is wandering over the face of the earth, looking for a safe haven, Signor Podrecca has very little time left to arrange an entire show that is as keen and mettlesome as the three or four best things in it.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, March 22, 1940

## Piccoli Pianist Is Again the Favorite of Podrecca Troupe

By BURNS MANTLE

**A**FTER six years the Piccoli Pianist remains the star of the Theatre of the Piccoli. As I recall the 1934 engagement the Pianist had a Bull Fighter rival. Or was it a trick mule?

In any event it is the Pianist who is the star today. His virtuosity has taken on polish and an elasticity that are remarkable. He is, quite without question, the most amusing performer on the marionette stage.

Signor Vittorio Podrecca's marionette revue began an engagement at the Majestic Theatre last night under the management of Cheryl Crawford. The prices are half what they were six years ago, and this makes it twice as good a value.

### Startling Skill

It seems to me it is at least a third better in other ways. The manipulators of the wooden-head specialists have always seemed possessed of an uncanny skill. Last night their dexterity and their precision were positively startling.

The acrobats of the troupe leaped into the air, swung themselves from tightropes, bounded about like leaves in a gale of wind and yet never missed their proper contacts.

The prima donnas heaved their bosoms and shook their top notes free of their pulsating throats as exultantly, and with as great relief, as their operatic counterparts.

In the ensemble numbers there is an American jazz band that is as funny as any you ever saw in any night club, and a Latin American Revue that is going to give Rumba Dan Walker the fitters.

The "Cinderella" story is told from cottage to palace and from stagecoach to magic forest, with a Massenet score sung by the

Podrecca choir. There are scenes from old Vienna that will make the "Reunion in New York" refugees homesick all over again.

### Question of Taste

The little people are permitted to stage only one number that may raise a question of taste. This is a dance number called "Men, Birds and Monkeys." In which three active colored brothers set a dance fashion for the animal kingdom.

Colored brothers are sensitive about such contrasts. It might be wise for Signor Podrecca to wash the black faces white.

Orchestra and vocalists are, as usual, first class. Lia Podrecca sang several soprano solos and Agostino Guidi did the "Ridi Pagliacci" effectively.

An audience of marionette enthusiasts attended to the welcoming reception last night, and Signor Podrecca made a twenty-fifth anniversary speech. But it is the amazingly skillful puppeteers who are the real stars.

### These Are But a Few of the Many Subscribers to Critics' Theatre Reviews

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University of Maine  
University of Michigan  
University of Oklahoma  
University of Pennsylvania  
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Allentown Call-Chronicle  
Hartford Courant  
Memphis Commercial Appeal  
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#### LITTLE THEATRES

Cedar Falls Players (Iowa)  
Chicago Workshop Theatre  
Le Petit Theatre du Vieux Carre  
Indianapolis Civic Theatre  
Richmond Little Theatre  
Pasadena Playhouse



# Theater of the Piccoli

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, March 22, 1940

## Broadway Acclaims the Piccoli

By LOUIS BIANCOLLI

VITTORIO PODRECCA's Theater of the Piccoli—a fantastic community of little people running their lives on strings—kept a first-night audience in stitches at the Majestic last night.

The orchestra played Rossini's Italian in Algiers overture, Signor Podrecca made a speech in what he called "brokissimo" English, and the curtain went up on the Italian marionette master's wonder world.

Incredible little figures strutted, danced, somersaulted, banged the piano like human beings. Dramas were enacted with all the nuances. Puppets sang the woes of Pagliacci. Gauchos galloped in on spindly-legged mules. Jazz bands and rumba bands bled miniatures.

After awhile you lost interest in how the thing was done and why the wires didn't jam. The life-like puppets became real. The music seemed to come from real throats and real instruments.

The prince really seemed to be kissing Cinderella, the diminutive Paderewski actually appeared to be playing the Second Hungarian Rhapsody of Liszt in his own gnomish way. Canio looked weebegone to the life. Signor Podrecca's illusion became hypnotic reality after the wonder wore off.

### Spasms in Jazz

First came a Piccoli jazz band, with leader and men registering more spasms than a human frame could hold. The puppets held on to the basic rhythm like Spartans. Not a beat was lost.

Tallerino and Canellone, wonder-working

acrobats, went through a whirl of gravity-defying stunts. Tallerino—he on the bottom—got a few gratuitous whacks for his pains. Canellone went the daring young man one better by flouting Newtonian law and coasting in mid-air like a seagull.

A music box version of Massenet's opera Cinderella had fancy costumes and a truly flesh-and-blood semblance to commend it, but the music went faintly awry, and the scenes dragged out a bit. The fairy sequences were a dream out of Walt Disney.

A swarthy trapeze artist, Bil-Bal-Bul, knee-high, bounded miraculously to a rope-line and had everybody's heart in his mouth by swinging madly to and fro until only the operator's dangling life-line saved him from disaster.

### Detachable Heads

What came next was actually a Danse Macabre. Four clowns skipped in nonchalant-

ly and suddenly their heads flew off, then their arms and shoulders, and the stage was a eerie sight of dismembered cadavers blithely footing it. There were a few tugs at the wires and the clowns promptly came together again.

A colorful Latin American revue that caught the tang of Hispanic rhythms wound up with a breath-taking rumba. Signor Podrecca's operators worked a minor miracle in hewing to the various lines and keeping a flock of Congo-wild ballerinas in their hot paces.

Waittime brought music by Schubert and Johann Strauss in a delightful round of song and dance numbers bathed in Viennese Gemuetlichkeit—all Piccoli. A satiric piece—showing evolution in reverse—brought out a sequence of men, birds and monkeys, the monkeys taking terpsichorean honors, bless them.

Canio's Ridi Pagliacci had a heart-rending scene to itself, the lugubrious clown wasting away in spasmodic jitters and throat-catching anguish. The marionette looked real enough to break anybody's heart. Backstage tenor Agostino Guidi launched him sobs by the barrel.

### Cinema Stars

Hollywood Parade unrolled a succession of stars beginning with Mickey Mouse, and ending, lastly, languorously, with Greta Garbo. The Marx brothers shuffled in three heads on one neck.

Finally, the Piccoli pianist, the one and only virtuoso, played the Liszt rhapsody in the grand style, repeatedly adjusting his coat tails, dosing off on a pianissimo and bounding up grotesquely for a fortissimo. The duet with the opera singer, a scrawny screecher, was too funny for words.

In his "brokissimo" English Signor Podrecca said, "We are proud to present here in New York, in the land of the biggest buildings, the littlest actors in the world."

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, March 22, 1940

## Puppet Show

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

SOMEHOW I would rather watch a puppet show than write about one. Signor Podrecca's marionettes are undoubtedly at the head of their class. They are more human, more amusing and more blandly satiric than any others, and the vaudeville show that they offer is lively and entertaining enough to provide a pleasant sort of novelty in the theater. My private opinion is that an entire evening of them is slightly excessive for tastes that are not rather specialized in their enjoyment, but there is no denying that this "Theater of the Piccoli" is an engaging and merry little presentation. Being virtually life-sized, these marionettes manage to provide just enough of a sense of reality so that their amiable parody on mankind has a certain piquant point about it. In a word or two, if you like marionettes, here is exactly the show for you.

After saying that the Podrecca marionettes are cute and likable and amusing and that they provide a gay kind of parody on mankind, what is there left for me to tell you? Well, for one thing, I can report with enthusiasm on what continues to be the most delightful item in the repertoire of the

"Theater of the Piccoli." It is, as every admirer of the show can tell you, the temperamental pianist, who studies his score so carefully, expresses his distaste for a bad singer so eloquently, battles with his piano so manfully and occasionally goes to sleep for a moment during his own concert. Here is the marionette show at its peak, both as to ingenuity and humor, and it really is an act to treasure. There are a lot of good things, in the evening's entertainment, but this is by far the best of all.

The most ambitious number consists of four scenes from Massenet's "Cinderella," attractively set and costumed. My guess is, however, that the marionettes are happier in their lighter numbers. Anyway, I am. The Piccoli Jazz Band, for example, is a delight, and there is color and liveliness in a Latin-American revue. The puppet show is an excellent medium for acrobats, also, and you will find these boys and girls performing handsomely in some of their most death-defying stunts. As a firm believer in the humanity of these marionettes, I am inclined to object, though, to a number in which the heads and, later, the arms of the little people come off and fly into space.

It is my firm belief that the review of a puppet show should do something more than tell you about a few of the acts. It should, therefore, that I tell you that I feel in no position to say any such things, possibly because with all my admiration for the ingenuity and the humor of marionette shows, I can take them or leave them alone. But there is no doubt that Signor Podrecca is at the head of his ancient and honored profession.

# "Goodbye in the Night"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, March 19, 1940

## Goodbye in the Night Opens at the Biltmore

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

**T**HROUGHOUT George Abbott's new shocker, *Goodbye in the Night*, which opened last night at the Biltmore Theater, I was reminded of a lurid series of murders committed by some foul fiend in one of the southern departments of France in which two entire families, I believe, were wiped out. After describing the grisly deeds, the French newspaper report went on to tell about the murderer. "This indiscreet man—" it called him.

Well, the indiscreet man in Mr. Abbott's murder play is an escaped lunatic who has great cunning (as story-book lunatics always have) and he succeeds in killing two persons off-stage and one on-stage in the gloom of night before he is recaptured by the asylum officials and taken back in a straitjacket.

There is, I regret to say, no relieving comedy to lighten the grim story, and there is also very little mystery to set the detective instincts of an audience in operation. There is the customary suspense, however, and some guesswork as to just how many of the cast will be alive at the final curtain.

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If it is the intention of Jerome Mayer, the author of this play, to frighten folks, he may succeed. But merely to frighten customers is not enough. There must be a sort of grim

fascination in such a play, the element that makes you cling with tightened fists to the arms of your chair. And this element, to me at least, seemed lacking. The play seemed to be, instead, merely a straightforward account of a horrifying episode that might actually have been reported in any newspaper of the day. It was a distressing report on a psychopathic suffering from delusions of persecution and fetishism.

Turning such a character loose in the countryside of Pennsylvania in the dead of night, and entangling his troubled life with that of an innocent old lady, a young man and his sweetheart, and a boardinghouse

floozy, while the police are hunting for him in their own peculiarly inefficient way, is however, certain to produce certain moments of shrieking horror. For good measure, if you want to be scared, there is a realistic thunderstorm, there are plenty of unexpected rap-tap-tappings at doors, there are ghostly winds blowing curtains about, there are complete blackouts when the electric current fails and there are hands coming from behind doors to snatch bloody clothing out of sight or grasp a damsel around the lily-white throat.

• • • • •  
These things, of course, are of the hokum that is time-honored—the common denominator of all mystery plays. You expect them and they are what make an ordinary tale of murder presentable. In this case, however, I am afraid the real mystery is not concealed deftly enough, and it is the grimness and unpleasantness of the whole business that remain in your memory rather than the ingenuity of the plot.

Mr. Abbott gives the public his usual good cast. James Bell, who seems to have a passion for playing desperate villains, is the murderous maniac, and he plays the part vigorously and capably. Jean Adair is comfortably at home in a part that calls for her motherly characterization. Mary Mason contributes the only charming bit of color, and Millard Mitchell, despite a trick mustache and a hoarse voice, either has forsaken his meter—which is excellent comedy of the tough-guy type—or else he had nothing in the cop's role calling for those qualities. I suspect that the latter statement is the truth of the matter.

It is distressing to turn in an adverse report on this one, because the theater could use a good mystery play right now. It has needed one, in fact, for many years. Or is it that the movies, with their mechanical perfection, can do this sort of thing better? Or have we all grown blasé in old age? You tell me.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, March 19, 1940

## "Goodbye in the Night" Acted at the Biltmore

By JOHN MASON BROWN

**D**URING the prologue and the first act at the Biltmore last evening, George Abbott seemed on the verge of supplying us in "Goodbye in the Night" with the kind of spine-twister for which many of us have been pining these many cadaverless months. A lunatic, a sort of older brother to Lennie with the same fondness for ringlets and a cruel accuracy with a knife, is seen escaping from an asylum in a thick fog. Thereafter this crazy man returns to his family's nearby farmhouse, a place of endless shadows, mysterious stairs, and suddenly opening doors with the asylum's siren screeching in the darkness and hatred in his heart. Thereupon things begin to happen in earnest in Jerome Mayer's guignol.

As a matter of fact things begin to happen so rapidly, and continue to happen with so little regard for sense and just for the sake of happening, that the introductory scenes, with their shivery effectiveness, are soon forced to count themselves among the many victims of Mr. Mayer's thriller.

### Homer-icidal

Many victims? Not in years has a modern play rolled up a greater casualty list. Whiteskins either bite the dust or are about to bite it with greater regularity than telephones jangle on the desks of self-impressed

executives. When no one is being homicidal or when no actual bodies are being carried out, there are always moans from upstairs, groans from downstairs, or screams in the dark to fill in the confused seconds. Far be it from me to give away a secret which the program keeps by printing only the names of the actors, but no wonder that one of the characters comforts another character (also a secret) when a noise is heard offstage by saying calmly—oh, very calmly—"That could be anything from steam being turned on to a body falling."

"Goodbye in the Night" ends up unfortunately by being that kind of play. It soon becomes too complicated for its own good. If you are as susceptible as you ought to be to suddenly opened doors, screams of terror, and mass-murderers in full migration, Mr. Mayer's melodrama continues to bring on its occasional attacks of goose-flesh and to hold your interest even when it has lost your respect. But it does itself in by being much too much of a bad thing. Although animated lobby discussions may be precipitated by its confusions, the involutions of its plot would doubtless evade Phil Vance, Einstein, Sherlock Holmes, J. Edgar Hoover, and Mr. Dewey.

The truth is that "Goodbye in the Night" soon begins to provoke laughs rather than thrills because of the ineptness of much of its writing. It does this, mind you, in spite of the sheer excellence of Jean Adair's performance (character unnamed), the horrible drive of James Bell's playing (it's up to you to guess what part he is acting), the intermittent skill of Mr. Abbott's direction, and the serie expertness of the settings by Clinker and Robbins. A true crime addict wants more logic with his terror than "Goodbye in the Night" has to offer.

# "Goodbye in the Night"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, March 19, 1940

## 'Goodbye in the Night,' a Melodrama, Opens at the Biltmore Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

GEORGE ABBOTT, in association with a dramatic author named Jerome Mayer and some actors, tried hard to scare a lot of people at the Biltmore Theater last evening, but the people wouldn't scare. Hands clutched and snickers greeted them, unhappy off-stage moans brought only chuckles and homicidal maniacs—of which in the general confusion there seemed to be several—were saluted with tolerant smiles. Considerable blood was shed, but not a drop was curdled.

Mr. Mayer's play, which is called prophetically "Goodbye in the Night," begins in an asylum and a heavy fog and continues in the fog. While guards blunder haplessly about in slow motion a maniac climbs over the wall and goes off about his murdering. While lightning rends the scenery he invades a deserted farmhouse, occupied by his brother and his sister-in-law, who is of strikingly abated mentality. He kills and kills and bodies are toted gloomily about. A dewy young couple is set down in the

midst of this to worry and a frivolous matron to provide comedy, and the scene shifts from farmhouse to a furnished room, to a filling station, where there is a lot more comic relief. The plot remains obscure and uninteresting.

Mr. Mayer has thrown in virtually all the

### 'GOODBYE IN THE NIGHT'

A melodrama in three acts by Jerome Mayer; directed by George Abbott; settings by Cirkor and Robbins; presented by Mr. Abbott at the Biltmore Theater on March 18, 1940. The actors in the cast, as listed without other description in the program, are:

James Bell, Jean Adair, Mary Mason, Paul Ballantyne, Natalie Schafer, Millard Mitchell; Edith Van Cleve, Marilyn Erskine, John Carmody, Owen Martin, Ruth McDevitt, William Sweetland, Marion Willis, Ernest Rowan, Ralph Morehouse, Peggy Gould, Richard Kelly.

familiar shiver gags, but none of them seems to work. Since the whole affair is abashingly inept and silly there is no reason why any of them should, and no apparent reason why Mr. Abbott should have gone to the trouble of telling James Bell, Jean Adair, Millard Mitchell and the rest where to stand and which way to cross. He doesn't seem to have worked very hard at it, as a matter of fact; the direction is about as disjointed and aimless as the play.

Mr. Bell is sinister as circumstances allow; Miss Adair as plaintively victimized; Mary Mason and Paul Ballantyne as dewy and frightened and dumb as Mr. Mayer intended them to be. Mr. Mitchell solves things with offhanded authority a couple of hours after the audience gives up caring. It's all pretty foolish.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, March 19, 1940

## Maniac on the Loose

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

UNTIL a really first-rate mystery melodrama comes along, "Goodbye in the Night" probably will have to pass for one. It is a pretty ramshackle example of its particular school of dramaturgy, but so great is the local eagerness for a good homicidal melodrama that the first-nighters gathered together at the premiere of George Abbott's fifth production of the season engaged in more animated and excited sidewalk conversation about the play between the acts than I have encountered anywhere else this year. For the truth is that, despite its confusion and its obvious lapses, "Goodbye in the Night" is a frank, outspoken and unashamed quest for primitive audience thrills, and, although it is a little too fraudulent to capture many of them, it does manage to be for a great part of the time rather pleasant fun. The only real trouble is that the acts decrease in interest, rather than build up to a proper climax.

If you want to find out what the plot of "Goodbye in the Night" is about, you will have to look elsewhere. It isn't that I don't want to tell you—I couldn't if I set my heart and mind on it. I know it is about a homicidal maniac who escapes from an asylum one stormy night to kill the man he blames for his fate, and that it deals with three murders, a lonely house, a frightened juvenile and ingenue and the ingenue's equally

frightened mother and that there is supposed to be some mystery about the escaped lunatic's identity. It is all told amid so much confusion, purposeful and unintended, and so many offstage noises of a sinister nature that it is unnecessary to keep up with it. Mr. Abbott, it seems, feels that it would be giving away the entire secret of his play if the playgoers were told just what parts the various actors have, but I think his drama is more mysterious than that. "Goodbye in the Night" would still be puzzling if he published an outline of the plot with it.

There is, I think, one serious flaw amid the otherwise amiable carryings-on of

"Goodbye in the Night." Its lunatic is a properly terrifying figure so long as he is committing his murders and leaving his identity in some slight doubt. When, however, he is finally captured and clamped in a straitjacket, where he writhes in torment, he ceases to be a frightening figure and becomes a pathetic one, and the whole fun of the thing is gone in one moment. Somehow, I think it would have been better for the outcome of the show if he had been shot during one of his depredations. (There I go, being a constructive critic again.) While looking for flaws, I would also like to ask why the maniac, who is shown in the prologue and first act as in mortal terror of lightning, bears up under it so well during the succeeding episodes. I think, too, that the killer might have been made into one of the most sympathetic characters of the season if he had just done away with that disagreeable child in the second act.

Since Mr. Abbott wishes a certain reticence to be maintained concerning the activities of his actors, it may be enough to say that James Bell is effectively concerned with the homicidal events of the evening, that there are helpful performances by the Misses Jean Adair, Mary Mason, Natalie Schafer and Edith Van Cleve, and that, since Millard Mitchell plays a detective with his usual skill, it is perhaps giving away no great secret to say so. I am still waiting for a completely satisfying mystery tale and "Goodbye in the Night" is too mechanical and confused and unable to keep up the effectiveness of its entertaining first act to be just the thing we have all been longing for. But even a lively second-rate drama of homicide is better than none at all, and while we are praying for something better, "Goodbye in the Night" has its moments. At least it is rarely boring, which is something.



# "Goodbye in the Night"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, March 19, 1940

## "Goodbye in the Night" Shiver Drama About Assorted Lunatics

"Goodbye in the Night," drama by Jerome Mayer. Produced by George Abbott at the Biltmore Theatre, New York, March 18, 1940.



By BURNS MANTLE

WELL, you can say for George Abbott that he never lets a play down. Everything he has to give he gives it. Take this "Goodbye in the Night" which he produced at the Biltmore theatre last night as an example.

It hasn't on the face of things one chance in ten of finding an interested playgoing public, but it is as expertly staged, so far as its mechanics go, as it could be if it promised a return of a million dollars profit.

That's Abbott. Come easy with the hits, go easy with the failures. Naturally it is pretty hard to forgive him his trespasses. It seems such a waste to put the profits of

"The Boys from Syracuse" and "Too Many Girls" back into such palpable gambles as "The Unconquered" and "Goodbye in the Night."

But it is just as possible that the gambles have something to do with that mysterious "movie money" we are forever hearing about. Maybe they do not represent Abbott judgment at all.

### Gooseflesh Drama

"Goodbye in the Night," written by Jerome Mayer, is a gooseflesh drama deliberately concocted for the mystery murder trade.

It begins one foggy night inside the walls

of an insane-asylum with the escape of Ollie, one of the milder but more determined homicidal maniacs.

It continues through the night, with Ollie settling an old grudge by doing in his brother-in-law, whom he blames for his mental condition and his incarceration.

### Tourists' Comedy

A trio of touring motorists, lost in the storm, seek lodging at Ollie's house and are drawn into all the weird adventures that follow Ollie's escape. Including the lunatic's attempt to incriminate them as fellow murderers.

This sort of thing has usually reached its peak of popularity through laughter. Beginning with "The Hat" and continuing down past "The Cat and the Canary," the exciting fun of the thing has always topped the extravagances of the somewhat laboriously builded mystery.

There are a few scattered laughs in Mr. Mayer's piece, but they are not inherent in the story. Rather, they mark the ineptness of its development. Usual visual horror is piled on horror until the structure topples and the experienced playgoing guests out front giggle nervously.

### Only Spoofing

The next few days you will doubtless be told that Mr. Abbott was only spoofing anyway. That he intended the whole thing to be supremely comic. And perhaps he did. But if he did he is rapidly losing his skill as the Number 1 producer of farce comedy on Broadway and deserves his Hollywood sentence.

The acting is professionally consistent. James Bell is as weird as a good gray ghost could be, and Jean Adair is perfectly molded into the form of an aging lady who has lived much of her life with the insane.

The others have little more than contributing bits to offer, but these are well timed and kept neatly in character by Paul Bantlaine, Natalie Schafer, Mary Mason, Millard Mitchell, John Carmody and Marilyn Erskine.

Mr. Mayer is in a position to appreciate what has been done for his play. He was himself the producer of Obey's "Noah," Lynn Riggs' "Russet Mantle" and the recent "Young Couple Wanted."

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, March 19, 1940

## George Abbott Makes a Mystery Out of Jerome Mayer's 'Goodbye in the Night'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

NOTHING is quite so mystifying about "Goodbye in the Night" as the proper way of reviewing it. It is a mystery drama by Jerome Mayer, who is ordinarily a producer. George Abbott, who used to be a playwright, produced it at the Biltmore Theatre last evening. In order to keep the cat concealed in the bag until the great third-act denouement, Mr. Abbott prints the names of his actors in the program without specifying the parts they play. This handicaps the reviewing profession; it is an act in restraint of trade. And it is also a handicap not to know whether Mr. Mayer and Mr. Abbott intend their play as a mystery, a horror play or a travesty on both. For it is to be feared that they have mystified their little maze of cues out of the theatre. After listening to shrieks and groans and staring at bodies for an hour or two, at least one first-nighter was prepared to see the ghost of "The Tavern" come up through a trap-

door and inquire, "What's all th' shootin' for?"

Or perhaps it would be more appropriate to inquire, "Who's loony now?" For "Goodbye in the Night" begins with the escape of a

homicidal lunatic from an asylum. In the prologue you see him padding softly through the darkness. In the first act you see some one murdering some one in the dim light of a frightened farm house. At about this time a party of automobile tourists turns up in search of shelter from a night that ain't fit for man or beast, and presently every one is hopelessly involved in a nightmare of dead men, puzzled cops, siren alarms from the asylum, feeble-minded gas station attendants, revolvers and bloody knives. Toward 11 o'clock, which is witching hour in the theatre, Mr. Mayer clears everything up with no trouble, mystifying you into wondering how you had ever been mystified by the play.

For "Goodbye in the Night" is mystifying, not because there is anything very puzzling in the story, but because Mr. Mayer remains vague about ordinary information. This makes the characters seem a little more stupid than most members of the human race. Almost any character could put a stop to the play in the first act by behaving with casual common sense.

Cirker and Robbins, manufacturers of adult toys, have devised settings in which window blinds blow realistically and neon signs swing ominously in the wind. Under Mr. Abbott's homely direction a number of good actors give good accounts of themselves. James Bell acts like a house a-fire. Mary Mason acts like an aspen in the moon of May; and Jean Adair, Millard Mitchell, Edith Van Cleve and Natalie Schafer do all right too. There is some mystery around here somewhere, but less than meets the eye, no doubt.

# "A Passenger to Bali"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, March 15, 1940

## 'A Passenger to Bali' Is Presented at the Ethel Barrymore Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THERE are rousing scenes of human and natural violence in "A Passenger to Bali," which opened at the Ethel Barrymore last evening. The stage roars with a tempest at sea, lightning flashes on reeling men and the deck of the doomed ship Roundabout rocks in a fashion to scare a landlubber out of his boots. But even in these circumstances the play's author, Ellis St. Joseph, finds time and room enough to turn a phrase. Now and then the author's eloquence outroars the wind, which now and then it otherwise resembles.

But the melodrama, as melodrama, is a good deal and not even the sometimes heavy fog of symbolism can obscure it. All the action occurs on board a little freighter, trundling the trade routes of the East. And all of it centers around the strange figure of a man who beque passage as a missionary and remains to become an incubus. The ship is in Shanghai when he comes aboard. It is sinking in the Pacific when we see the last of him, and meanwhile he makes trouble. Everywhere he had been he made trouble, and all the East knew him, and none of the ports would have him. Once on the shoulders of Capt. English's ship, he could not be shaken off.

The author tries several times to describe this menacing figure, and never makes him quite clear. He is a "dictator in search of a country." He is the personification of ruthless force and of demagoguery; he is half mountebank and half "Leader," and it is never clear quite what he wants. He disrupts the crew and fans hate among the officers.

He roisters with the firemen in a typhoon and murders casually and brings an end to the ship. And the captain will not meet force with force, or sink to the level of his unwelcome passenger and he is patient under jeers. He is patient until the end, living by law, and only by law will he free himself and his crew. He finds a law to fit the crime, finally, but by then the ship is finished.

It is clear that Mr. St. Joseph sees this story as symbolic. The Rev. Mr. Walkes is unrestrained force and guile. The captain is the embodiment of law, the eternal antagonist of irresponsible personal rule. On this theme, or near it, the author piles his eloquence. Now and then, without ever quite hitting the nail of his point on the head, he writes with considerable style and feeling for phrase. Almost as often, it seems to me, his words have more sound than meaning. And certainly the drama is to a considerable

### 'A PASSENGER TO BALI'

A play in three acts by Ellis St. Joseph; staged by John Huston; settings by Lawrence L. Goldwasser; presented at the Ethel Barrymore Theater on March 14, 1940, by Montgomery Ford. The cast:

Mr. Slaughter.....William Harrigan  
Kali.....Kale Desl  
Mr. Wrangle.....Victor Becroft  
Chew.....Harry Lowe  
Captain English.....Colin Keith-Johnston  
Rev. Mr. Walkes.....Walter Huston  
Minheer Van Mataysa.....Edgar Stehli  
Hon. Mr. Chisholm.....Cecil Humphreys  
Crew—Tony Avila, Pete Alcopra, Benito Aliswanag, John Bermudez, Rosal Bantulan, Don Cabanilla, Aurelio Doba, Vincent Lascano, Paul Navarre.

degree stifled by eloquence. Nor does the symbolism seem to have been clearly thought out. There is a kind of fussiness about the ideas of the play.

But the action itself is exciting and absorbing. Its virtues are enhanced by various performances, including particularly those of Walter Huston and Colin Keith-Johnston, as the antagonists. Mr. Huston's fine voice roars grandly through the Rev. Walkes's periods; he has the swagger and assurance to fill the role and if he does not always clarify it that is because the writing is not over clear. He fills the stage, at any rate, and his performance is robust.

Mr. Keith-Johnston is terse in performance, even when the author is wordy, and there is refreshing sharpness in his characterization of the captain. William Harrigan plays forcefully as the Roundabout's first officer and Victor Becroft is admirable as the second. Edgar Stehli and Cecil Humphreys make far too brief appearances among the others in the all-male cast; Lawrence L. Goldwasser has built a fine ship on the stage and John Huston has made an excellent job of directing the action around the author's words. "A Passenger to Bali," with these virtues, barely misses being a good play.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, March 15, 1940

## Dictator at Large

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

ALTHOUGH Ellis St. Joseph, the author of "A Passenger to Bali," has written a melodrama about seafaring men in the South Pacific, he apparently had at least half an eye on the Munich of appeasement days. Although he is telling us of a sinister derelict who is the scourge of the Asiatic ports, he seems to be thinking of Fascism and dictators and war and hatred and all sorts of extraneous things of a social-minded nature. With his mind on two things at once, Mr. St. Joseph has tended to grow both mixed and obscure and to let his play get pretty much out of hand in the last act. Yet because his melodrama has some properly ominous scenes, an occasional sense of looming menace and a narrative that has been a provocative one ever since it was first told about Jonah, "A Passenger to Bali" manages to be, for most of the way, a play possessing considerable dramatic interest. I wish it had explained its parable more clearly or had dropped it altogether, but I found my attention consistently held by this curious South Sea fable.

On the surface the author is offering us the saga of a sinister fellow who comes aboard the tramp steamer Roundabout one night in Shanghai in the guise of a missionary and pays the skipper well to take him to Bali. There is an air of mystery about him, and Mr. Slaughter, the first mate, is pretty suspicious, especially when the Kanaka crew starts getting drunk. It is only when the ship reaches Bali and the presumable missionary is refused permission to land

that the captain learns that he is a notorious adventurer and seeker after power, a dictator in search of a country to rule, as one of the characters puts it. The stranger is, in fact, so evil a fellow that no port in all of the Far East will take him, and the captain finds that he is stuck with him for life unless he kills him. In the end an impressive stage typhoon arrives and the stranger loses his power and the captain finally rebels against his wicked oppressor.

Now, of course, it is possible that the playwright has no parable in mind and is merely telling us a straightaway melodramatic story, but all of the evidence is against any such viewpoint. Even the names of the ship and of such characters as Mr. Slaughter, Mr. Wrangle and Capt. English indicate that Mr. St. Joseph had an allegory in mind. I must

say, though, that I am not altogether clear as to what he is about. Obviously his villain symbolizes the spirit of dictatorship or Fascism or whatever you want to call it at the moment. The lust for power, the author believes, is so evil a thing that it turns men against each other, sows evil where none grew before and makes even those who would fight it take on the image and likeness of what they would destroy. In the end, when this evil spirit triumphs, his victory is an empty one, for the world that he has won, in this case the good ship Roundabout, is a ruined thing, carrying its own destruction. If I'm not right about all this, Mr. St. Joseph is as much at fault as I am.

The role of that symbol of all that is evil is played by that admirable actor, Walter Huston, who gives the man all the power and strength of character that the part demands. Unfortunately, though, even when he is being a monster of evil Mr. Huston is always the most engaging person on any stage and, although you are supposed to be against him, you are likely to be rooting for him to the end. In fact, when the nominally sympathetic Captain English finally shoots him, you will find yourself pretty mad about it. My guess is that the play suffers from the very fact of this particular Huston virtue. Another fine actor, Edgar Stehli, is especially good as the Dutch official of the port of Bali, and Cecil Humphreys is effective as a British consul with an appeasement temperament. William Harrigan is excellent as the officer named Slaughter (he is the fellow who favors direct action against the spirit of evil) and Victor Becroft is helpful as an officer named Wrangle (he likes to talk a lot). Colin Keith-Johnston is Captain English (he is upright, kindly and not given to subtleties). The storm is fine. "A Passenger to Bali" is obscure and often faulty, but it is provocative.

# "A Passenger to Bali"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, March 15, 1940

## "A Passenger to Bali" the Story Of a Crook Without a Country

"A Passenger to Bali," drama by Ellis St. Joseph. Produced by Montgomery Ford at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, New York, March 14, 1940.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

THE late Lincoln J. Carter would have had a grand time at the Ethel Barrymore theatre last night, where the new play of the week was a drama of the South Seas called "A Passenger to Bali," written by Ellis St. Joseph and produced by Montgomery Ford.

You wouldn't be remembering Mr. Carter, in all probability, but he was a producer of plays back in the eighteen nineties when your correspondent was young and impressionable. And Carter always had something in the way of stage effects to make you sit up or duck your head.

I think it was in "The Heart of Chicago" that a full-sized steam locomotive came puffing down to the footlights and threatened to dive into the orchestra pit. And "The Tornado" in which the heroine leaped a perfectly frightful chasm on horseback, with her child smothered against her bosom.

"A Passenger to Bali" is much better than any play that Lincoln J. Carter ever wrote, but it does place a good deal of dependence upon a typhoon that rocks and rips a tramp freighter from stem to stern in the third act.

### Aboard the Freighter

Without a typhoon it would be no more than the rather dull story of a defiant trouble-

maker who, having been banished from a majority of the ports of call in the Southern Pacific, tricks himself a passage aboard the freighter "Roundabout," Captain English, and can't be put off. One port after another refuses to receive him.

He is a crook without a country and his situation might be pathetic if he did not make light of it. As it is, the crew of the Kanas and the captain are the ones to be pitied.

A good deal of work has been done on the production of "A Passenger to Bali." The cast is especially well chosen, with that fine actor, Walter Huston, playing the defiant one.

The stage setting is a minor masterpiece

in stage realism by Lawrence Goldwasser, and the lighting, by Feder, is something to take the class to see. John Huston, Walter's son, with a suggestion or two from Herman Shumlin they say, has kept the direction simple and believable.

### Not Enough Play

But there just isn't enough story to interest an audience for more than thirty minutes. And, as I was saying the other day, if you imagine it is good acting that theatregoers shop for in the theatre you are mistaken. Good entertainment is the only thing that interests them. "A Passenger to Bali" is no better than fair entertainment.

Mr. Huston meets whatever part he plays with a kind of ringing challenge. I have yet to see him play a part that has not been immensely bettered by his performance.

With no more than a few minutes in which to establish the cheater on his way to Bali, he fires the imagination of his audience, and commands its liking in so far as the author permits. But he cannot completely replace the play.

William Harrigan also does much for the role of a chief mate, playing him with a Scotch accent and a withering contempt for the Ball Jonah.

Colin Keith-Johnston seems physically handicapped for the role of the freighter captain, who demands force. Cecil Humphreys, Victor Beecroft and Edgar Stehl are excellent in short parts.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, March 15, 1940

## Walter Huston Appears in Ellis St. Joseph's Modern Allegory, 'A Passenger to Bali'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

SINCE Walter Huston is in it, let it pass for a play. It is Ellis St. Joseph's "A Passenger to Bali," which was acted at the Ethel Barrymore last evening. Literally it is the story of a mysterious passenger who comes aboard a freight ship at Shanghai for Bali, but is refused permission to land anywhere in the East. To Mr. St. Joseph the story is doubtless a modern allegory with implications that go much deeper than an exotic Conrad tale. But writers of allegory must bear some of the responsibility. They must write clearly on at least one plane. What "A Passenger to Bali" represents in Mr. St. Joseph's mind this theatregoer cannot pretend to know.

But taken at face value it is a poorly written sea yarn that is poorly acted with the exception of Mr. Huston who gives good, swaggering performance in an inconclusive role.

He is Reverend Mr. Walkes. Just as Captain English's tramp freighter is leaving Shanghai, with Mr. Slaughter and Mr. Wrangle serving as mates, he slips mysteriously on board and persuades the skipper to take him to Bali. But the Netherlands boarding officer recognizes him as a trouble-maker

and refuses him permission to land. Bangkok will not take him. Shanghai refuses him when the ship arrives there on a second visit. The British consul even suggests that Captain English might discreetly murder him at sea and save the whole world from a nuisance. Somewhere in the Pacific a storm bursts over the ship. To make matters worse Mr. Walkes picks this time to debauch the crew with liquor. When English orders his men to the boats, he first takes the precau-

tion to shoot Mr. Walkes and leave him on the sinking vessel.

To any one who understands what Mr. Walkes means in Mr. St. Joseph's cosmology this may be a particularly awesome catastrophe. But to a literal-minded theatregoer it is merely a showy climax to an incompetently written play. Before a man can write on two levels he ought to be able to write with some natural skill on one. At least he ought to show some familiarity with the material with which he is working and the environment his characters are supposed to inhabit.

Lawrence L. Goldwasser, serving as scene designer for the voyage, has designed a ship that rocks, makes nautical noises and lurches through a hurricane, and Feder has lighted it in the proper baleful mood. There has never been such a ramshackle craft, which is doubtless part of the symbolism. As the man of mystery, Walter Huston plays with the easy roll and the magnetism of a singularly able actor, representing something or other most attractively.

Most of the performance is a good deal less than that. As the captain, Colin Keith-Johnston hardly acts at all; he seems nervously tense and muscle-bound. In one brief scene as a cynical British consul Cecil Humphreys does make a few intelligible points of character, including a dash or two of humor; and Edgar Stehl introduces another finished character portrait as a boarding officer. But William Harrigan's first officer shares the general pointlessness of a rambling and shiftless performance. It would have been an act of theatrical mercy if Bali had let the Reverend Mr. Walkes walk in at the end of the first act.



# "A Passenger to Bali"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, March 15, 1940

## Passenger to Bali Stars Huston as Adventurer

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

**I**N SPITE of the cheerful unholiness with which Walter Huston plays the part of a scoundrelly adventurer in the Far East, *A Passenger to Bali*, which arrived last night at the Ethel Barrymore Theater, falls far short of being the thrilling melodrama intended by the author or promised by so excellent a cast.

Mr. Huston himself carries over some of the swashbuckling joviality of the more attractive Peter Stuyvesant of Knickerbocker Holiday, into this role of unbridled criminality, but even he cannot make the character attractive—nor, for that matter, the play.

Ellis St. Joseph, the author, began with a rather fascinating idea. On board a British tramp steamer, ferrying between the ports of the mysterious East, he placed as a passenger a drunken minister of Satan, so evil in his nature and person and reputation that not a single authority would permit him to land at any of the various ports of call.

With this as a premise, it was Mr. St. Joseph's evident intention to show how such a force, let loose in a law-abiding community, can wreck it. The passenger, a man without a country, appears destined to saddle his baleful influence upon the crew and ship until moral disintegration and physical rot destroy them both. But the melodrama ends—after a rather frightening uphoon, accomplished with thunderous offstage noises, the cracking of masts and the megaphonic

shouting of orders—with the unwelcome passenger neatly shot by the English captain, and the crew escaping in the lifeboat.

What all this purports to show, I cannot say. It tells, in a sense, of the callousness of authorities on shore who are so blind to the troubles of those who go down to the sea in ships, but it doesn't make any particular point of that. It may pretend to teach that the British seaman generally has a heart of oak (and lungs of leather), but it seemed to me that some of the men behaved rather badly in a time of crisis, so that couldn't have been Mr. St. Joseph's point.

If, on the other hand, "*A Passenger to Bali*" is intended merely as entertainment, then again it lacks, for all its tremendous storm,

sufficient driving power or suspense to keep the passengers in the orchestra seats from fidgeting—and from wishing that they'd throw the Jonah overboard and solve the problem with celerity and dispatch.

The reality of Lawrence Goldwasser's settings, even including the rolling deck (which was belied by a stationary, idly-painted sky) could not convince one of the reality of the situation on this hell-ship. I do not pretend to be a sea lawyer, but it seems to me that it lay within the power of the master of H. M. S. Roundabout to settle the hash of the evildoer before he was 24 hours out of Shanghai.

Reflect that the Rev. Walkes (Mr. Huston) was traveling on a forged passport; that he brought vast packing cases full of Holland gin aboard and distributed it among the Kanaka crew without let or hindrance; that he debauched one of the officers with liquor; and that he was permitted, practically unguarded, to roam the ship freely, carrying his evil into every part of it—and you will wonder, as I did, why the honest British sea-dogs couldn't have found something in the rules to put a halt to all this villainy. They cannot be the same breed of men who ran the Altmarek to earth.

Mr. Huston plays this unbelievable place with his usual heartiness, and dominates the stage with robust, brazen and sardonic humor. Mr. Colin Keith-Johnston, on the other hand, seems hardly to believe in the character he is called upon to assume, and one can hardly blame him at that. William Harrigan plays the first officer in forthright and honest fashion, but Cecil Humphreys, I regret to say, seemed to caricature the part of a cold-blooded English consul more broadly than was warranted even by the author's rather bitter drawing of the man. Victor Becroft put his excellent cockney accent once more to good use as Mr. Wrangle and Edgar Stehl, who can always be relied upon to give an excellent performance, didn't fall in his part, that of a Dutch consul.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, March 15, 1940

## Walter Huston Returns In "A Passenger to Bali"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

**N**O DOUBT Ellis St. Joseph was more literal than he meant to be when he christened his tramp freighter in "*A Passenger to Bali*" the Roundabout. For even with Colin Keith-Johnston in command, and such a passenger as Walter Huston on board, the voyage Mr. St. Joseph takes us on at the Ethel Barrymore proves to be no more than a disappointing zig-zag.

The trouble with his plot idea—at least when it is feebly stated in dramatic form—is that it is difficult to believe in. And being difficult to believe in, it is almost impossible to get excited about. Mr. St. Joseph's concern is of a psychological kind more easily

described in narrative than illustrated in action. His play is the story of the way in which a freighter in the Far East is demoralized from crew to captain by an evil passenger, disguised as a missionary, who turns out to be a notorious character no port will permit to land.

He is a superhuman villain, this dictator without a country, this Jonah who thinks he can swallow the whale, this man with a genius for destruction who steals on board the Roundabout ultimately to wreck its captain's fortune by losing him his ship. But in

the theater, where seeing is believing, and good upright Mr. Huston is on hand as the embodiment of evil, talking about crimes he has committed on offstage islands and in offstage ports, seeing somehow makes disbelief easy. So does hearing.

Mr. Huston is at his best in his quiet moments in the mess room in his first act when, cigar in mouth, he listens wickedly for a Dutch official's cataloguing of his criminal record. But he works industriously all evening. He huris long speeches of defiance at all accessible and inaccessible gods. He says bravely many things which must be as hard to say as they are to listen to. He dances, preaches, blusters, and staggers. If by temperament he is not equipped to be the appalling Mr. Walkes of the text, Mr. Huston does at least go about his unpleasant duties conscientiously. His must be the consolation of knowing that even Charles Laughton, who would have been a happier choice for the part, could do little or nothing to save Mr. St. Joseph's play from its ineptitude, its slowness, its tedium, and its silliness.

As seen at a preview at the Ethel Barrymore, Lawrence L. Goldwasser's setting for the Roundabout rolled and pitched, creaked and lurched in good shipshape fashion. The trouble with "*A Passenger to Bali*" is not the boat that carries it. It is the dramatic cargo with which that boat is burdened. For as a melodrama, boasting in addition to Mr. Huston's presence the services of such players as Mr. Keith-Johnston, William Harrigan, Edgar Stehl, and Cecil Humphreys, "*A Passenger to Bali*" lacks the woman's touch. And that woman's name is Mother Sill.

# "The Fifth Column"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, March 7, 1940

## Fifth Column Stirring Spanish War Drama

Hemingway Play Is Remarkably Produced and Excellently Acted

WHEREVER you stand on the principal issue, Ernest Hemingway's first play, *The Fifth Column*, which was presented by the Theater Guild at the Alvin last night, is a stirring evening in the theater. For wherever you stand on the issue of the Spanish civil war, Mr. Hemingway has pinioned the horror of that war under his massive, muscular style of writing, the Guild has given what he has to say a remarkable production, and Franchot Tone, Katherine Locke, Leonore Ulric and Lee Cobb among others, are paying it the best compliment of acting that you will behold on the Broadway stages—this season.

Officially, it is not wholly Hemingway's play that the Guild put on last night. As the program puts it, it is an adaptation by Benjamin Glazer from the published play by Hemingway. Mr. Glazer has done a heroic job, as anyone who read the published versions cannot fail to notice, in smoothing out the wrinkles, stopping the gaps, tightening the scenes and generally confining the play within three walls, where Mr. Hemingway seemed to have so much difficulty restraining them.

But the dynamic identity of the author of *The Fifth Column* is unmistakable. Since this is Hemingway's first play it is raw in spots. And why should it not be? As the author wrote, it was composed during the cruelest phase of the Spanish war, in the steady Madrid bombardments; and while Hemingway was putting plot and dialogue together the Florida hotel where he made his headquarters was hit by more than 20 high explosive shells. Having written it in that hardly conducive atmosphere, Hemingway was done with it. "If it is not a good play," he remarked afterward, "perhaps that (the bombardment) is what is the matter with it. If it is a good play perhaps those 30-some shells helped write it."

If he were occupying this space today he

could not have summed up the case better, for *The Fifth Column* is the testimony of a man who has been witness to one of the most terrible moments in history. If the Spanish civil war seems far away to you today, if it seemed far away in Maxwell Anderson's brooding reminder of it in *Key Largo*, it looms large and real and unforgetting in Hemingway's account of it at the Alvin. In that respect Mr. Glazer's adaptation does not include a job of retouching for the sake of softening the harsh lines around the battlefield.

Hemingway is writing of the enemies within during the siege of Madrid, who came to be known as the fifth column. While four of Gen. Franco's columns were shelling and bombing their way to the city, a fifth column was sabotaging the Loyalist cause inside the city. To combat this insidious foe, an American correspondent has volunteered in the counter-espionage, his fellow operative being a disfigured German named Max, of unshakable idealism and indomitable courage. But to Philip Rawlings, the American newspaper man, the war has ceased to have much meaning—and like most wartime Hemingway characters—he is restless to flee the incomprehensible massacre or get his own life over with quickly.

To the room adjoining his at the Hotel Flor-

ida comes an American girl who is seeking news of her brother in the Lincoln Brigade. They fall almost instantly in love and a conflict between his loyalty to a cause he had originally espoused out of high ideals ("We've signed up for 10 years of undeclared wars," he says later) and his romantic notions about the girl, Dorothy. At first he is willing to turn deserter, to join her across the border in France, despite all Max's pleas and taunts to duty. Later, when he is granted official permission to depart with the disbanded American volunteers, he prefers to remain in what one of the characters, speaking for Mr. Hemingway, calls "the whole world's struggle" against Fascism.

But if we are giving the impression that *The Fifth Column* is one long forensic on one side of a hugely controversial issue, then we hasten to correct it. For while Mr. Hemingway makes no bones about where he or his characters' sympathies and passionate convictions lie, he also happens to be a master story teller. If the original play suffered from the frenetic circumstances under which it was put together, it now is as taut as stretched elastic. The scene behind the railroad is an episode fraught with the kind of excitement Hemingway can impart from viewing and chronicling the brutality of war. The scene in the cafe only could have been written by the same man who used to dote on them in company with bull fighters and wrote of them so vividly. The scene at the army headquarters, where a spy is brought for questioning, will move you closer to the edge of your shivers, a spy-thriller—and the love scenes are Hemingway at his best.

If *The Fifth Column* were not so superbly acted and staged by Mr. Strasberg, it might have been considerably less stirring. But it is constantly ablaze with inflammatory performances. Franchot Tone does the most magnificent job of his career as the American journalist, a role which is as fully depicted by Hemingway as his disillusioned soldier in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*; and Lee Cobb evokes an emotional tempest with his portrayal of the disinherited German who declares himself a soldier of freedom and "the dignity of man" on all battle fronts. As the American girl, Katherine Locke is poignant and lost amidst issues too bewildering for her to grasp. After needless absences from these parts, Leonore Ulric turns up in the part of a sultry Moorish tart and drew acclaim for her performance last evening, and no account of the cast would be complete without high words of praise for Emile Meyer, who impersonates the garrulous hotelkeeper, or Arnold Moss in the hard, cold, cultured role of a Loyalist officer who is dedicated to discipline. Mr. Hemingway's initial fling at the stage is a most auspicious one. Regardless of which side you happen to be on, this is a stirring evening in the theater.

GEORGE ROSS.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, March 7, 1940

## "Fifth Column" Opens With Ulric and Tone

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IT IS A pity Cupid has to pull so long and fabulous a bow in the war in Spain as Benjamin Glazer makes him do in his freely rewritten version of Ernest Hemingway's published drama, *"The Fifth Column."* Because Cupid does not take his place in the ranks . . . even behind local footlights . . . as a reliable combatant against General Franco and the forces of Fascism. His darts and his "darlings," his love potions and his boudoir crises, appear somehow irredeemably irrelevant—as trivial at the Alvin, at least from this safe distance, as they now seem very much beside the point compared to what was at stake in Spain.

If Cupid's promotion to the status of commandant in Mr. Glazer's adaptation of Mr. Hemingway's play is doubly regrettable it is because *"The Fifth Column"* (as written, rewritten, and produced) has its undeniable virtues. It may lack to an incredible extent the magical touches of Mr. Hemingway's authorship. It may dawdle for scene after scene over a love story which is at best unconvincing. Its form may be far from perfect,

But obviously it has something to say. And no less plainly, in spite of its ineptitudes, it does possess its unmistakable authenticity whenever it deals brutally with the brutalities of modern war. Furthermore, it proves far more interesting, even in its in-and-out manner, than the printed script would have led one to expect. It has been generously produced by the Theatre Guild, is

well directed by Lee Strasberg, and, in addition to including a fine performance by Lee J. Cobb, it can boast the most brilliant performance for which Franchot Tone has so far been responsible on the stage.

### Counter Espionage in Spain

The *Fifth Column* of Mr. Hemingway's title refers, according to his own explanation, to the statement made in the fall of 1936 by the Spanish Rebels "that they had four columns advancing on Madrid and a Fifth Column of sympathizers inside the city to attack the defenders of the city from the rear."

In other words, the melodrama Mr. Hemingway first fashioned under gunfire, and which Mr. Glazer has endeavored to make both more orderly and lurid, is a play about counter-espionage during the war in Spain. As it reached the stage last night it is a many-scened dramatization of those very principles of idealistic devotion which Maxwell Anderson stated in his much better and more passionately written prologue to *"Key Largo."* In this case Mr. Tone plays an American journalist in Spain turned second-rate cop, as he puts it, who finally decides to abandon marrying the American girl with whom he has fallen in love (after raping her in this version) to sacrifice himself in the fight against Fascism. Just why he could not have married the girl and stayed in Madrid even to die is something Mr. Glazer and Mr. Hemingway never quite get around to making clear. But their presidential point is that the frontiers of democracy begin wherever liberty is threatened. And this they manage to get started far more effectively

(Continued on page 466)

# "The Fifth Column"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, March 7, 1940

## Hemingway's 'The Fifth Column' Opens at the Alvin Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

**E**RNEST HEMINGWAY'S "The Fifth Column," which the Theater Guild offered last evening at the Alvin, has undergone alteration since it was published some months ago and there have been trimmings here and additions there. But it is still an unshaped mass of drama which sprawls over its theme and flows sluggishly into side-alleys. Only in the last of its several scenes does the play, as adapted by Benjamin Glazer, achieve the vitality always latent in the story and sometimes evident in the characters.

The story is simple. It is concerned with a young American newspaper man who went to Madrid to report the civil war and remained as espionage agent of the Loyalist Government, combating the "Fifth Column" of Franco sympathizers within the Government's lines. His work was of necessity merciless. His success led inevitably to ruthlessness. He sickened of war and then he met a girl. Love between them begins in harshness and grows into poignancy. When, after a day or two, the girl is ordered out of Madrid he dreams of going with her to sunshine and a gentle life. But honor keeps him to the failing cause, which he sees as the unchanging cause of free men against tyranny. With a friend he renews his enlistment in a war which, he foresees, will be without remission and last out his time.

Hemingway has told much of this story in a series of violent, not closely related, episodes. There are raids on enemy outposts, violent deaths, the interplay of casually introduced characters. In some cases the physical action has movement and vigor. The dialogue, although generally in need of sharp cutting, has pungent reality. But such excitement as is engendered ebbs and flows, and little suspense is created because the

author's purpose is effectively concealed. More than half the play has the appearance of sporadic melodrama, slowed down by fairly long speeches, and apparently moving in no particular direction. Only because the central characters are three-dimensional and the speech salty does three-fourths of "The Fifth Column" differ from mere spy melodrama—only by these virtues and by the lack of straight-forward clarity in the action.

Some, but by no means all, of these preliminary incidents are gathered up at the end. When the situation narrows to the man, his girl and his cause and the conflict within this triangle is defined, the play takes on vividness and meaning. Technical uncertainty still leads to some scattering of the emotion, but the closing moments of the play have much of the impact one expects from Hemingway. So, even earlier, have some scenes and most of the characters, particularly the male characters. But the play as a whole is uncertain and confused.

The acting is neither. Given a character to bite into, Franchot Tone bites hard. His

### 'THE FIFTH COLUMN'

A play in eight scenes by Ernest Hemingway; adapted from the printed version by Benjamin Glazer; designed by Howard Bay; directed by Lee Strasberg; produced by the Theater Guild, Inc., at the Alvin Theater on March 6, 1940. The cast:

|                               |                 |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| Anita                         | Lenore Ulric    |
| Philip Rawlings               | Franchot Tone   |
| Max                           | Lee J. Cobb     |
| A Sentry                      | Arnold Moss     |
| A Soldier from New York       |                 |
| Wendell K. Phillips           |                 |
| Another Soldier               | Henry Levin     |
| Hotel Manager                 | Emile Boreo     |
| Dorothy Bridges               | Katherine Locke |
| Preston                       | A. J. Herbert   |
| Petra                         | Hilda Bruce     |
| A Signaler                    | Henry Levin     |
| A Sentry                      | Raoul Henry     |
| Another Sentry                | Michael Sage    |
| A Thin Officer                | John Gerard     |
| A Man in Civilian Clothes     | David Leonard   |
| A General from Germany        |                 |
| William F. Schoeller          |                 |
| An Orderly                    | Philip Lewis    |
| Doyle                         | Charles Jordan  |
| Hotel Electrician             | Don MacLaughlin |
| An Assault Guard              | Sid Cassel      |
| Private Wilkinson             | Michael Sage    |
| A Man in a Brown Leather Coat | Kendall Clark   |
| John Gerard                   |                 |
| Another Assault Guard         | Raoul Henry     |
| The Buttery Man               | Harry Davis     |
| First Waiter                  | Sid Cassel      |
| Second Waiter                 | Philip Lewis    |
| An Artilleryman               | Michael Sage    |
| Two Assault Guards            |                 |
| Fred Catania and Peter Knego  |                 |

performance in the central role is a vigorous and telling one. Katherine Locke, in the rather passive role of the girl, achieves many moments of poignancy, and Lee J. Cobb, playing a battered German fighter against dictatorship, acts with impressive force and sincerity. Lenore Ulric has come back to give color to the part—the oddly incidental and purposeless part—of a Madrid café girl who is the journalist's follower. Arnold Moss, Emile Boreo and half a dozen others play excellently, helping to make all the characters in the play more vital than the play itself.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, March 7, 1940

## Madrid

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

**M**R. HEMINGWAY'S play has had many adventures of one sort or another since he wrote it in the shell-wracked Hotel Florida in besieged Madrid back in the grim and terrible days of the Fascist war in Spain. Now after a long and troubled sojourn in Philadelphia, Boston and Baltimore, it reaches town in an adaptation by Benjamin Glazer as a Theater Guild production, and it can be said that the result is surprisingly impressive. Something of Hemingway has gone out of it and something of Hollywood has gone in as a natural result of the author's willingness to leave his script unprotected in the hands of others and "The Fifth Column" shows resulting signs of discomfort in its determination to tell a sort of love story. In fact, whenever it goes into its romance, the play has an unhappy way of standing still. Yet happily a great deal of the spirit and heroism and horror of valiant wartime Madrid clings to the drama and, splendidly played by an excellent cast, it emerges in its Theater Guild manifestation as a striking and powerful, if not always satisfying, work.

Unquestionably "The Fifth Column" is at its best in its earlier sections, although it pulls itself together in time for a proper ending. The account of the nervous tension and embittered grimness of the besieged city, with the secret Fifth Column of Fascists working in the dark against the harried government, with the Americans and Germans of the International Brigade engaged in counter-espionage for the loyalists, with shells being dropped into Madrid by Fascist

artillery on the nearby hillside and with the battered Hotel Florida holding forth in what seemed virtually the front-line trenches—all of this is managed with fine effectiveness. Then the somewhat cleaned-up Hemingway heroine enters, in search of her lost brother, and romance rears its dubious head. The hero, the young American engaged in counter-espionage, has grown bitter and resentful at his ugly job, and longs, of course, to go back to America with the girl he has come to love. All this takes up valuable time in some static scenes, but in the end Philip Rawlings decides to stay and fight, although all is lost. It is truly a happy ending, in that it saves the play.

So much war and international chicanery and shifting of allegiance have taken place since the days of the assault on Republican Spain that "The Fifth Column" might seem in danger of appearing outmoded to current

audiences. Perhaps, too, as a guest of the hospitable Hotel Florida during the siege of Madrid, I found an additional personal interest in the new play. It seems to me, however, that not only has something of a heroic atmosphere been captured by the drama, but that something of the importance of a struggle, which, had it turned out differently, might conceivably have kept the present war from Europe's doors has been suggested. In at least one character, too—that of a stalwart German anti-Fascist, who has been tortured by the Nazis—a quality of true valor and gallantry of spirit has been set down. Most of the minor characters are vividly drawn, also, although the role of the central figure has been less clearly presented than it should have been and the part of the heroine seems completely vapid.

When I say that the character of the American newspaper man, who is a counter-espionage agent of the government, has not been as clearly outlined as it should have been, I am speaking merely of the writing of the part. Franchot Tone, giving the best performance of his days in the theater, is so forthright and vigorous and understanding in the role that he adds to it all the necessary qualities and gives us one of the ablest portrayals of the season. Lee J. Cobb is particularly fine as the German anti-Fascist and Arnold Moss is splendidly forceful as the head of the loyalist counter-espionage service. Miss Katherine Locke has a difficult and colorless role as the nominal heroine but she manages to make it surprisingly human. Miss Lenore Ulric plays a Moorish girl with that sultry skill that made her so celebrated a figure in the New York theater and the other characters are well managed. I can report to you that the sound effects of the shelling of the Hotel Florida are realistically managed. "The Fifth Column" has its share of defects but it is an interesting play for all that.



# "The Fifth Column"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, March 7, 1940

## "The Fifth Column" Gives the Theatre Guild Solid War Drama

"The Fifth Column," drama by Ernest Hemingway, adapted by Benjamin Glazer. Produced by the Theatre Guild at the Alvin Theatre, March 6, 1940.

By BURNS MANTLE

THE Theatre Guild has finally come upon a theatre piece into which it can figuratively set its teeth. This "Fifth Column," sired by Ernest Hemingway and prepared for the stage by Benjamin Glazer, shown at the Alvin Theatre last night, has many of the elements that go into the making of stage success.

It has a moving and exciting story of strong men in adventurous situations. It has romance represented by one of those seductions which have furnished best-selling Hemingways with the sex motif for their most popular writings for two decades last passed.

It has an off-stage war that rumbles realistically yet avoids visiting war's more repellent horrors upon the audience. And it has a scattering of noble sentiments, uttered in the name of a liberty that men fight for and abuse after they get it.

### Echo of Another Triumph

Add these theatrical virtues to a fine Guild production, plus an outstanding Guild cast and you have an entertainment at the Alvin that gives off a healthy echo of the days when "What Price Glory?" was the town's war-play sensation at the Plymouth.

In fact, because its two leading male roles, those of Philip Rawlings, played by Franchot Tone, and a Nazi-hating German, Max, played by Lee J. Cobb—because these two are physical brothers under the skin to the late Captain Flagg and Sergeant Quirt, there is a strong and pleasantly reminiscent flare-

back to the Stallings-Anderson drama.

Rawlings and Max are the intellectual superiors of the Flagg-Quirt duo, but their sections are still those of hard-boiled crusaders, brutalized by the business they have embraced.

### In Madrid

"The Fifth Column" refers, not too clearly, to the snipers back of the lines who bore from within in every war, civil or general. Rawlings is an American newspaper correspondent drawn to Spain through his sympathies with the Loyalists who finds himself working in Madrid in 1938 as an undercover representative of the espionage forces. Max, a victim of Nazi persecution, is his working partner.

They are engaged in considerable dirty business when Dorothy Bridges, also American, is assigned the room next to that of Rawlings in a Madrid hotel.

Comes a bombardment and Dorothy's screams draw the slightly alcoholic Rawlings to her. Once in her room she cannot get him out.

When Madrid falls Rawlings, having been forgiven, as Hemingway heroines always forgive, is preparing to follow Dorothy to Paris and marriage. Max and the cause get in the way.

There is a bit of preaching in the last act, as there had to be if these sometimes muddled liberty idealists were to justify their author, but the drama is held fairly taut.

Last night's audience, in fact, as well as one with which I was privileged to sit at a dress rehearsal on Tuesday night, was well pleased at having found again a thoroughly sound theatre piece where it belongs, which, quaintly enough is in the theatre.

### Efficient Actors

The performances achieve a healthy melodramatic fervor. Franchot Tone manages a convincing display of front-line horrors, and tones these to an honest expression of romantic love that has his audience as well as his vis-a-vis, the gently yielding Katherine Locke, completely subjugated.

Lee Cobb buries himself impressively in the role of the embittered German crusader who is enlisted for the duration of all the wars there are, or may yet be, for liberty.

It is good to find Lenore Ulric back in one of her colorful studies of exotic females. A good supporting role, that of a Spanish officer, is well played by Arnold Moss. Welcome touches of comedy are added by Emile Boreo and Hilda Bruce, as hotel workers.

The settings by Howard Bay have an overlay of decay that is nicely atmospheric, heightened by effective lighting. Lee Strasberg has provided a forceful direction.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, March 7, 1940

## Ernest Hemingway's 'The Fifth Column' Put On by Theatre Guild—Drama of Spanish Civil War

By BROOKS ATKINSON

DURING the last few years Ernest Hemingway's "The Fifth Column" has passed through so many hands that most of us have despaired of it. Obviously, we despaired too early. In Benjamin Glazer's adaptation it opened at the Alvin last evening under Theatre Guild auspices. Most of it rings true with the kind of metallic echo Mr. Hemingway can strike off a contemporary subject, and it is notably well acted by an excellent company. He wrote it behind the lines when the Spanish Loyalists were standing up to the rebels. That was not a situation calculated to produce the perfect play. But it probably accounts for the hardness and bitterness of Mr. Hemingway's portrait of warfare, which is drawn with an iron-tipped pencil. Most of "The Fifth Column" is a profoundly convincing and moving drama of death in the night, murder by day.

It is centered in the emotional life of an American volunteer who, much against his will, is working in the secret service on the side of the Loyalists. To Philip Rawlings the Spanish war is every man's fight for freedom. Instead of representing freedom boldly on the battlefield, however, he is engaged in the furtive business of tracking down information about the Franco sympathizers who are sabo-

taging the Loyalist cause behind the lines in Madrid. That is necessary work from his point of view, but it is harrowing and revolting and it tortures his emotions. He falls in love with a politically disinterested American girl at a moment when he is most desperate, and he plans to desert from the army and escape with her to a neutral country. In the second of the two acts, Mr. Hemingway proves that this is impossible.

Although the love affair is probably as genuine as anything in the play, somehow it emerges as commonplace against a vividly realistic background. The second act of "The Fifth

Column" is accordingly the least dramatic part of the play, and the stumpy speeches have merely a dutiful flavor. But when Mr. Hemingway is writing an exactly detailed narrative of men at war, flinging themselves wearily into a sickening business, steeling themselves to things that violate decent instincts, drug-ging their natural sympathies, perverting ordinary enthusiasm into bloody ferocity—in those scenes Mr. Hemingway speaks a bold word for the truth in dialogue that blazes with sincerity. There has been no more vital writing this season.

Nor has there been a more stirring performance than the one Lee Strasberg has directed on the Alvin stage. Franchot Tone is playing the chief part with the earnestness of an actor who respects the part completely and has the elasticity, energy and courage to act it brilliantly. In a part that is less caught up in the tornado of Mr. Hemingway's drama, Katherine Locke plays with beauty and reticence, avoiding in her acting the common-placeness of the role. Lee J. Cobb plays with superb honesty the part of a quietly determined comrade. Lenore Ulric gives an excellent performance as a Spanish trollop. Arnold Moss as a nerveless inquisitor, Emile Boreo as an amusing hotel keeper and Hilda Bruce as a wily chambermaid help to complete the color and variety of a fully awakened performance. Howard Bay has provided settings that catch the sombre patience of an old city that is holding out against overwhelming odds.

Although "The Fifth Column" is an uneven play that never recovers in the second act the grim candor of the beginning, it manages to make a statement that is always impressive and sometimes poignant or shattering. The cautious tone of the writing is merely the neurotic edge of an author whose emotions are on edge. Mr. Hemingway has got under the skin of a living subject, and turned burning indignation into a courageous declaration of principle.

# "The Weak Link"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, March 5, 1940

## 'The Weak Link,' a Scanty Farce, Opens at the Golden Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

ALLAN WOOD'S "The Weak Link," which opened at the Golden Theater last evening, is pretty much all right as far as it goes. It has funny lines here and there, an entertaining performance by Hume Cronyn, revolver shots and traces of menace. The only real trouble is that there just isn't very much play, Mr. Wood apparently having run out of ideas almost immediately after he got his first one. This is too soon to run out of ideas in melodramatic farce.

Mr. Wood's first idea was to have an ingenious young puzzle solver happen in on a gang of crooks who had a big puzzle to be solved. They wanted like anything to steal

\$100,000 from a bank downstairs and had gone to all the trouble of pretending to be a Bankers Protective Association to do it. Then they couldn't think what to do next, and the arrival of Peter Mason was a godsend. Mr. Mason, a bashful lad with a pretty girl, always heard bells ringing in his head when he saw the weak links in plans, such as plans made by banks to protect \$100,000.

Ensuing events must be pretty obvious even to those who did not see "Whistling in

the Dark" in 1932, when Laurence Gross and Edward Childs Carpenter had substantially the same idea and did a good deal more with it. Mr. Mason has to dope out a plan to get the \$100,000 and then he has to dope out a plan to get away and he almost has a nervous breakdown trying. Since Mr. Cronyn plays Mr. Mason, most of this is pretty amusing.

But none of it is ever believable, even as the believable goes in farce. Nobody is really

### 'THE WEAK LINK'

A comedy in three acts by Allan Wood; directed by Chester Erskine, setting by Harry Horner; presented at the John Golden Theater on March 4, 1940, by Mr. Erskine in association with Philip Adler.

The cast:  
Matt King.....Lloyd Gough  
Rosetti.....Don Costello  
Mr. Franklin.....Hugh Rennie  
Doc Morin.....Edmund Dorsay  
Swede Larsen.....Ray Mayer  
Peter Mason.....Hume Cronyn  
Gale Roberts.....Peggy French  
Red Connelly.....Grant Mills  
State Policeman.....Selden Bennett  
Policeman.....Albert West

menacing Mr. Mason; nobody is really robbing banks. It's all just something Mr. Wood whipped up rather carelessly to pass an evening, or part of one. The complications are few and not particularly ingenious; the plotting is loose and casual. "The Weak Link" needs more of almost everything—more dodges, more excitement and more menace. In other words, more play.

Mr. Cronyn brightens his corner with timorous comedy. Ray Mayer, Lloyd Gough, Don Costello, Edmund Dorsay and Grant Mills make a likely gang of crooks, and Miss Peggy French is ornamental and inexperienced. Hugh Rennie makes a brief and rather odd appearance. He enters, goes to a telephone, gets Washington in a short trice and says, firmly, "Give me J. Edgar." I really don't think he should bother Mr. Hoover about "The Weak Link."

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, March 5, 1940

## "The Weak Link" Opens at the Golden Theatre

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IN THE vernacular of gangsterdom which Allan Wood might easily have made exciting at the Golden last night, one hates to have to reach for one's "chopper" (sawed-off machine gun to you) when dealing with "The Weak Link." Still duty is duty, as the boys at the FBI all know. So even a dramatic critic has no other choice than to follow the example set long ago by Victor Moore and whip out his 'Putt-Putt-Putt.'

It requires no Master Mind to fathom just why it is that Mr. Wood's melodrama forces the head to be shaken solemnly from side to side in disapproval instead of permitting it to bob up and down in glad as-

sent. Mr. Wood has a good idea. It was a good idea when Laurence Gross and Edward Childs Carpenter developed it some seasons back into a serviceable thriller known as "Whistling in the Dark." And it remains a

good idea even when Mr. Wood is palpably misusing it in a different statement.

### The Worm Turns

As you may recall in "Whistling in the Dark" Ernest Truex was forced to suffer

(and audiences suffered with him) when as a famous spinner of detective yarns he was trapped into planning "the perfect crime" for a gang that made him a prisoner. In "The Weak Link" Mr. Wood's hero is a young eccentric whose specialty is warning bankers about the defects in their defenses against burglars. Thinking he has landed a job in a Bankers Protective Association, this young eccentric is compelled to help some thugs disguised as private detectives in their plot to rob the very bank in which he and his sweetheart have just deposited a hundred dollars.

The formula of the worm-turning of the little man outwitting the crooks, of Jack killing the giant, is, of course, one of the most dependable staples of farce. Even so in Mr. Wood's hand it proves utterly unreliable. Although he tightens his story in one or two scenes, and very occasionally wins the laughs which his fable deserves, his play (both as written and directed) practically cries out loud for the guiding hand of George Abbott. It needs the surety, push, and pace Mr. Abbott brought to "Three Men on a Horse." It stands sorely in need, too, of drastic re-writing, of staging that has some precision to it. The uncertainty of the writing and direction spreads like measles through the cast. Even Hume Cronyn, an accomplished actor on occasion, surrenders to the general indecision. For as it is, in its present sadly unfinished state, "The Weak Link" is its own weakest link in a good chain of thought.

# "The Weak Link"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, March 5, 1940

## 'The Weak Link,' a Humorous Melodrama About the Master Mind of a Gang of Robbers

By BROOKS ATKINSON

JUST suppose that a young chess genius unwillingly becomes master mind of some gangsters, and you have the basic scheme of Allan Wood's "The Weak Link," which was acted at the John Golden last evening. Since Mr. Wood is a radio writer and never gets out of doors, it is probably news to him that a similar situation resulted in "Three Men on a Horse." But it is still a good ground plan for a theatre lark, lightened with humor and stiffened with melodrama. In the present instance it results in a flabby first act, a second act that is some improvement and a third act that is vastly enjoyable. Three good acts are twice as entertaining as one good act, for the theatre has its own rules of mathematics. But the third act of "The Weak Link" is worth waiting for. It is the stoutest link in Mr. Wood's dramatic chain.

The master mind is a young yokel, steadily unemployed, who amuses himself by all sorts of mental gymnastics. When he has nothing better to do he likes to search for the weak link in the defenses of banks against bank robbers. Being jobless, he na-

turally offers his abilities to a bank protective association. Although the bank protective association has imposing offices, it is really composed of a gang of thieves who are trying to figure out how to steal a certain \$100,000 payroll on a Saturday afternoon. They trick the puzzle expert into finding the weak link in the bank's defenses. Then they trap him and his girl in their offices while they put his plan into action. Most of Mr. Wood's humorous melodrama consists in his

attempts to escape back into the more tranquil world of unemployment.

Obviously, "The Weak Link" would provide a stronger evening of entertainment if Mr. Wood could write the whole play with the swift tension he has drawn into the capital last act. It takes him some time to get warmed up, and Chester Erskin, as director, is also a slow study. But in deference to the amusement and excitement of the final act, this column will confine the higher criticism to a point of ethics. According to Aristotle, a humorous melodrama about an American bank robbery should never kill a man in cold blood. It is the weak link in innocent entertainment. Dryden, Dr. Johnson, Lessing and Brunetiere concur in this fundamental rule of twentieth century American melodrama. Never murder a man out of sheer wantonness if you want the customers to keep on feeling humorous. It is also a sheer waste of actor if it occurs in the second act.

In the first act Mr. Erskin has some difficulty in getting the performance started. He keeps his actors exchanging positions as if they were changing cars. Unless some one cautions him he will be having the audience shifting from one side of the house to the other before the week is out. But he is fortunate in having Hume Cronyn play the part of the mental giant, for Mr. Cronyn's guileless earnestness of manner is a good sounding-board for the crises of the play. The cast includes quite a gallery of lethal-minded rogues. Peggy French represents the woman interest with considerable success in this corner. As usual, Harry Horner, has done the setting satisfactorily. Give Mr. Wood the handicap of a slow first act and "The Weak Link" becomes an entertaining shiver show.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, March 5, 1940

## Bank Robbers

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IT IS a modest and synthetic but rather entertaining little comedy melodrama that slipped quietly into the John Golden Theater last night under the title of "The Weak Link." To tell you the worst about it at the start, it is a pretty frank amalgamation of two pieces of reliable theatrical trade goods of the past, "Whistling in the Dark" and "Three Men on a Horse," and it has much of the spirit and atmosphere of one of those breezy Class B films of the better type, which it doubtless will eventually become. At the same time it is lively and pleasantly unostentatious in its story-telling and it succeeds in combining laughter and excitement in the proper scientific degrees for such theatrical fare. Put it down as an amiable enough adventure in the minor drama.

As in the manner of "Three Men on a Horse," the new play has for its hero a mild little man with a genius for an unexpected profession, who falls into the hands of a desperate group of gangsters. As in the case of "Whistling in the Dark," it is the tale of a boy and girl whose lives are endangered by killers. The central character of "The Weak Link" has a talent for discovering ways of

robbing banks. His plan, you will be relieved to know, is to sell his ideas to the law, so that bandits may be thwarted, but he falls into the hands of the Bankers Protective Association, who are safe crackers by trade. It may take you some time in the first act to get on to some of these plot complexities, but after that the new work hardly presents any mental problems for playgoers.

This is the sort of play that usually falls

into the hands of George Abbott, who has a great talent for brightening this type of manufactured stage entertainment and rendering it inventive and persuasive. But Mr. Abbott seems to have been busy with serious things, such as "The Unconquered," and had no time for the adventures of the innocent little safe cracker of "The Weak Link." Chester Erskin, who did get around to directing the play, brings less inventiveness and sense of comedy to bear on the proceedings, but he has staged it well enough to keep it moving in lively fashion. The result is certainly no important contribution to the art of the theater, but if you agree with me that there is a place on the local stage for an occasional foray into the less lofty realms, then you may find the new work not without its entertaining aspects.

A great part of the amusement value of "The Weak Link" comes from the likable performance in the leading role of that good young actor, Hume Cronyn. It is the sort of thing Ernest Truex used to play, and I suspect Mr. Cronyn of managing it with greater dexterity. Miss Peggy French, a newcomer, is agreeable as the halfwitted heroine, and the bandits are well played by Lloyd Gough, Don Costello, Edmund Dorsey, Ray Mayer and Grant Mills. There is also a good setting by Harry Horner. If you expect anything of important quality in "The Weak Link" you will be wasting your time, but as a sort of dramatic equivalent of an entertaining pulp magazine crook tale, you will find it most endurable. Certainly it is the best thing to come along in the long couple of weeks, which is small praise enough.



# "The Weak Link"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, March 5, 1940

## "The Weak Link" Has a Couple Of Weak Links, But Is Good Fun

"The Weak Link," comedy by Allan Wood. Produced by Chester Erskin and Philip Adler at the John Golden Theatre, New York, March 4, 1940.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

IF Chester Erskin, producer, can get you into the John Golden Theatre and convince you that you should, for the fun of the thing, accept the premise of Allan Wood's farce, "The Weak Link," you're pretty sure to have a good time.

But this premise is in itself a weak link and fairly hard to take. The locale is the office headquarters of a mob of crooks located in one of the chief bank buildings of a mid-Western city.

The mob is operating pretty openly as a Bankers' Protective Association, doing a good deal of loud talking and displaying enough warnings to the police to bring the law down on them at least two days before they opened.

Into the office wanders one of those radio quiz wizards with a system. He can find the weak link in every kind of setup, be it checkers or crime. And he wants a job.

### Like a Couple of Others

The mobsters gather him in much as the

racehorse touts gathered in the hero of "Three Men on a Horse." And they put him to working out bank-robbing schemes without any weak links in them much as the gangsters in "Whistling in the Dark" set Ernie Truex to evolving a perfect murder.

Thereafter the quiz wizard is held prisoner (together with his fiancée, who has come to

find him), softened up with physical torture and threatened frequently with slugs in his belly if he attempts to escape.

The development is pretty obvious, but never without suspenseful interest and with an occasional tricky twist to keep the action fluent, and the comedy on tap.

The perfect bank robbery is planned and brings about an anticipated climax, but not an anticipated theatrical routine. Which is all that can be reasonably demanded of this type of crook comedy.

### Good Actors

The casting is good. Lloyd Gough, Don Costello, Edmund Doraay, and Grant Mills furnish a plausible quartet of refined killers.

Hume Cronyn is a perfect choice for the Truex-Lynn role of the timid expert. Ray Mayer does what he can with a comedy Swede and Peggy French is dutifully sweet and dumb as the fiancée.

A good-looking interior by Harry Horner and studied but usually effective direction by Mr. Erskin.

"The Weak Link," I'd say, would be cheap at a dollar, though expensive at three. Another perfect candidate for the Adelphi, if "See My Lawyer" has other plans.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, March 5, 1940

## Weak Link Is Full of Laughs

### Wood's New Play Opens at the Golden

A HARMLESS-ENOUGH little farce called The Weak Link came to the Golden Theater last night, and if it didn't leave them rolling in the aisles, at least it left them laughing, which is something not to be spurned these days. So harmless is Allan Wood's trifling conceit, in fact, that any attack upon its failings and qualities would be tantamount to assault and battery. For while its faults are many and its virtues can be counted on your fingers, it is good-natured and frolicsome enough to be congenial and slap-happy.

The weak link in The Weak Link, of course, is that it is forged out of pretty thin stuff and as a blitstfarce, it sometimes clips along with the alacrity of the action on the Western Front; and more often than not, instead of waiting for the laugh to die down you are waiting for one to come along. And yet, with all its deficiencies as a ripsnort, The Weak Link manages to hang on amiably until the very end, with no considerable harm done.

### New Plot Line

It is a new farce out of the filing cabinet marked Three Men on a Horse, with everything

conveniently rearranged to suit the new plot line. A cheerful little band of bank robbers are operating over a bank under the guise of being a bankers' protective association, and who should wander in, in the midst of their dilemma about the big stickup, but the little fellow with a genius for working these things out on the side of law and order, of course. So he goes to work on their problem and is detained with his fiancée until his plan is executed, and for the remainder Mr. Wood garners his laughs by the meek little man's

efforts to extricate himself and the ingenue from the burglars' clutches.

That is all there is to it, actually, and if everybody in the cast were not so warmly disposed and so eager to hop on every opportunity to animate an otherwise dormant script, The Weak Link would be considerably duller. Even Chester Erskin, serving in the capacities of both producer (in association with Philip Adler) and director, who used to be in a generally somber mood back in those old days when he was fatally dubbed the theater's Wonder Boy, has cast all care aside in staging The Weak Link at the liveliest gait he could command. It isn't his fault that the script's unsteady legs fall under the lash of his whip.

### Friendly Crooks

As the dumb and playful crooks, Lloyd Gough, Don Costello, Edmund Doraay and Ray Mayer are a smiling and coy set of cracksmen, and Mr. Mayer, especially, would be an extremely affable fellow to come across suddenly at your wall safe some evening. As the puzzled little genius in the field of burglary, Hume Cronyn is pleasant, and so is Peggy French, who fills a somewhat skimpy role as his girl friend.

As we indicated, Mr. Elkin's offering is a harmless enough little entertainment, and if the first night parishioners weren't getting hysterical over it, at least they were laughing at the final curtain. And as we hinted earlier, that's nothing to snicker about nowadays.

GEORGE ROSS.

# "The Burning Deck"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, March 2, 1940

## 'The Burning Deck,' a First Drama by Andrew Rosenthal, at Maxine Elliott's

By BROOKS ATKINSON

SOME day Andrew Rosenthal will probably write a rousing drama. In the meantime he has written "The Burning Deck," which was put on at Maxine Elliott's last evening. It is a first play, and sounds it, although it looks like the work of a man who has an original approach to familiar material. On a small island in the Mediterranean he has collected some remarkably poisonous people who live contentedly in an atmosphere of malice and corruption. Mr. Rosenthal apparently regards them as a breed that is dying in a headlong world. But perhaps he admires them more than he is willing to admit. For he revels in cleverness, strewing their dialogue with some intolerable puns and self-consciously lewd retorts; and he worships the fashionable playwright whose morality he is compelled to deplore. Mr. Rosenthal is romantic, which is no sin, and he is young, which is no crime; but he has an interesting way of going about the job of writing a play.

His representatives of cosmopolitanism are fashionably odious. Thrown together in a secluded hotel on an island, they while away their time with intrigue. Most of the women are shamelessly pursuing an objectionable London playwriting which is perhaps a bit of wishful thinking on Mr. Rosenthal's part. All the mature people in the drama are doomed—fortunately. But a girl, who hopes to be a composer, and an American lad, who hopes to be a playwright, are trying somehow to take root and grow in the feeble soil that the mature people have long since exhausted. Somehow, without being too literal about it, Mr. Rosenthal manages to give an impression that something is dying and something is also growing in an indolent, cynical world.

He is not quite so sophisticated as he wishes he were. Nearly all his wit is imitative. Some of it is adolescent. He has probably learned about life by studying the most jejune caricatures of it on the smart stage, and now he is sedulously aping them in his first attempt at wicked brilliance. He might do himself and us the favor of never again trying to

write about such people in the theatre. Why not stay on this side of the water until cosmopolitanism comes a little easier? Staten Island, for example, is so admirably close to hand.

If Mr. Rosenthal's writing is uncertain, so is the performance, which in general lacks definition. In the part of a drunken observer, Dennis Hoer does sprawl and shuffle to some purpose and make a character. As the most atrabilious character in the play Marion Mill is crisp and lucid. Mary Howes and George Lloyd put some clear imagery into the parts of the young people. Edith King acts a disillusioned actress with decision. But the others drift around aimlessly inside characters that are never really formed, and Zita Johann seems to have acquired a whole bundle of tortured postures that are meaningless. Vigorous direction might have shaken most of the loose ends out of the performance.

Apart from Harry Horner's sunny setting, this column cannot conscientiously recommend "The Burning Deck" as professional entertainment. But Mr. Rosenthal has an unhackneyed way of getting to work on a play. Some day when he finds material he can work with, and some day when he swears off facelessness, he may be a better playwright than the one he is now offering enviously as the hero of his first play. Just now he is feeling romantic about cosmopolitanism.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, March 2, 1940

## Don't Bother

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THE bad news continues. In fact, it gets worse. Nothing, it seems, is stable about the theater any more, not even mediocrity. Just as all of us, in the midst of our depression about the current state of the theater, at least begin to cheer ourselves up a bit by saying that, anyway, the worst has come and gone, along comes some new misfit to prove that we were all sentimental optimists. This time it is something called "The Burning Deck." Do you want to hear anything about it? Well, even though you don't, I had to sit through it, and who are you to be let off everything? It is all about a lot of dull people on an island in the Mediterranean and how they brooded over their various frustrations and talked a lot of prose.

Although given to what may loosely be called epigrams, the author of "The Burning Deck" is of a serious turn of mind, and he is quite in earnest about art and artists. They belong, he believes, to a sacred profession, and they must suffer and sacrifice and work long hours by candlelight and stay away from Davenport, Iowa, if they are to achieve masterpieces. So, in the end, the juvenile's mother goes back to America, leaving her son to stay on the island with a dying girl pianist and write plays, in the optimistic conviction that her child has become a man. Meanwhile the boy's father who is a great playwright but too amorous, goes back to London and a native plays a flute offstage and a ship is torpedoed in the harbor and Europe is at war.

If all of this sounds slightly confusing, I am only partially to blame. Between the brooding and the soul-struggles and the sophisticated whimsies and the frustrated love-making that occupy the three acts of "The Burning Deck," there is quite a bit of muddy activity and thought of one kind or another, and a lot of attention is required if you are determined to learn what the author is up to. I think he probably was impressed by Philip Barry's "Hotel Universe" at a very early age and has never got over it. An earnest and serious-minded cast labors valiantly but to a minimum of avail. "The Burning Deck" is just another unhappy demonstration that high gravity of purpose is not enough in the theatre. For, whatever the author's intentions were, I am sure they must have been of the best.

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# "The Burning Deck"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, March 2, 1940

## 'The Burning Deck,' a Comedy, Opens at Maxine Elliott's Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THERE is a dense, weedy growth of epigram in "The Burning Deck," which opened at Maxine Elliott's Theater last evening. There is also a scintillating woman who pauses when the fancy strikes her, raises a finger archly and says, "You silly boy!" It is my belief that she directs this reproach at one of the other characters rather than at Andrew Rosenthal, the play's author, but there is silliness enough in "The Burning Deck" to go around.

The action of "The Burning Deck" twitters on the veranda of a small hotel on a Mediterranean island which, understandably, prefers to remain anonymous.

The characters are numerous and obscure. There is a world-weary, but brilliant, playwright. There is a soddish but philosophic, British army captain, retired. There is a young painter who teaches zoology and who lives in a neighborhood referred to by Mr. Rosenthal, with loathing, as Greenwich Village. There is a girl who has only a year to live and is composing music like mad and there is a boy from Davenport, Iowa, whose mother doesn't want him to write plays. He is also the son of the world-weary, but brilliant, playwright, who left Davenport hurriedly years before and quickly changed his name.

These people have many and cryptic prob-

lems and Mr. Rosenthal darts from problem to problem like a dizzy bumblebee. He dashes furiously on one tangent, bumps into an epigram and bounces, buzzes off about something else. Bumping into one of Mr. Rosenthal's epigrams is nothing to sneeze at and after one or two such encounters even Mr. Rosenthal pauses, dazed. But then he is off again, worrying about the playwright and the boy from Iowa and the girl who, although she leaps about the stage in a frenzy of youthful vigor, is doomed by an incurable disease—author's disease, a dread malady.

The plight of the boy from Iowa most con-

### 'THE BURNING DECK'

A play in three acts by Andrew Rosenthal; directed by Robert Milton; setting by Harry Horner, presented at Maxine Elliott's Theater on March 1, 1940, by Jack Small. The cast:  
Captain Applegate.....Dennis Hoey  
Nicholas.....Ivan Triesault  
Don Juan.....Alfred Hesse  
Jeffrey Brandt.....Russell Hardie  
Baroness Maude de Rossi.....Marion Mill  
Niki de Vobourg.....Gregory Gaye  
Rex Wolfson.....Onslow Stevens  
Margaret Eaves.....Edith King  
Cornelia Lauren.....Vera Allen  
Roby Lauren.....George Lloyd  
Nina Brandt.....Zita Johann  
Raphael.....Frank Downing  
Ava Andrus.....Mary Howes  
A Native Boy.....George Calvert

cerns Mr. Rosenthal, who is a deep believer in art. The boy's mother wants him to return to Davenport and sell furniture and everybody else, including Mr. Rosenthal, wants him to stay in the Mediterranean and write plays. He stays in the Mediterranean and writes plays and Mr. Rosenthal heaves a sigh of relief. After seeing "The Burning Deck," I am not at all sure that this constitutes a happy ending. This business of writing plays can be carried too far. Mr. Rosenthal, for example, carries it to an extreme of adolescent silliness.

There are several in the cast who deserve to be elsewhere—Vera Allen, Zita Johann, and Mary Howes among them. Dennis Hoey and Onslow Stevens also do their best and Marion Mill is agreeably startling at times. Some of the others jump around a good deal, but it is a play to make anybody fidgety.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, March 2, 1940

## "The Burning Deck" New Play at Maxine Elliott's

### Tourists on a Mediterranean Isle

By WILELLA WALDORF

"THE BURNING DECK," which opened last night at Maxine Elliott's Theater, is not a shipboard melodrama, but a play about frustrated artists, titled loungers and incidental rif-raff at a small hotel on an island in the Mediterranean. To make it all seem intensely up-to-date, the war is going on outside, but it has no very profound effect on the lives of the characters until a couple of deep booms are heard at the end of the next to last scene. It was a nice change from the rumbles of thunder that had previously served to punctuate the dialogue when the author decided they would be most effective, and it also served as an excellent excuse to bundle most of the guests off home shortly afterward. If the war hadn't reached this particular island in the Mediterranean when it did, we have an uneasy feeling the play would still be going on, and that would never do. Even plays like "The Burning Deck" must end some time.

The chief notable on the island is a playwright who writes one artificial London hit after another but occasionally likes to get away from it all, especially since the war has turned out to be such a bore. In his now flippant, now serious fashion, he casually manipulates the lives of his fellow guests and is finally instrumental in giving his young son a chance to untangle himself from mothers' apron strings and take up a writing career instead of going back to Davenport, Iowa, and the furniture business. The son doesn't know the playwright is his father. It seems the toast of London ran away from

wife and child in Davenport nineteen years before. Yet here they all are at the same Mediterranean hotel. C'est la guerre, or perhaps c'est la coincidence.

### Off-Stage Music

Mr. Rosenthal, who wrote "The Burning Deck," has thought of just about everything to put into it. He has several incipient plots, a formidable array of witticisms and catty remarks uttered for the most part by the Baroness Maude De Rossi and Margaret Eaves, the aging ingenue; the usual heavy drinking on the part of the retired British army officer in a wrinkled palm beach suit; the marital troubles of the artist who can't manage to slap paint on canvas and his wife, the second-rate violinist; off-stage music by a determined pianist who has only a few months to live, and piping by a dreamy na-

tive, not forgetting the thunder at all the proper moments and, at last, the boom of cannon.

"The Burning Deck" is so self-consciously contrived, so elaborately arranged for purposes of atmosphere, so full of clichés and so childishly delighted with its hackneyed little bits of drama and its sophisticated nifties that we can't help feeling a trifle cruel in calling attention to the fact that it is a very dull piece. It is as if we had slapped down a precocious little boy, whose efforts to entertain are occasionally astonishing but more often tiresome.

### An Excellent Cast

It is always amazing to find a company of excellent actors involved in affairs of this sort, and last night's cast actually succeeded at times in whipping up spurts of interest in the proceedings, until the author came along with one of his stagey stunts and shattered the illusion.

Onslow Stevens dealt nobly with the role of the playwright, and the son who didn't know his father when he saw him was remarkably well played by young George Lloyd. Russell Hardie drowned his sorrows in drink (and in the ocean) with conviction, Dennis Hoey sipped up whiskey with the studied ease of a retired British officer, and Zita Johann, Vera Allen, and Mary Howes played the more serious-minded of the female contingent with intelligence and anguish.

The heavy task of spouting most of the boudoir wise-cracks fell to Edith King, as the actress who was growing older and to Marion Mill as the Baroness with the fetching accent.

"How did you sleep?" some one would ask the actress.

"Alone," she would reply.

It was Miss Mill, as we recall it, who had the rare treat of referring to Monte Carlo as "the bedroom of the Riviera."

The author apparently considered this hot, sophisticated stuff, and it is to the everlasting credit of Miss King and Miss Mill (who was making her Broadway debut last night) that they actually succeeded more often than not in making it sound almost decadent.



# "The Burning Deck"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, March 2, 1940

## "The Burning Deck" Might Be Called 14 People on an Island

"The Burning Deck," comedy by Andrew Rosenthal. Produced by Jack Small at Maxine Elliott's theatre, New York, March 1, 1940.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THERE didn't appear to be much point to Andrew Rosenthal's comedy called "The Burning Deck," produced at Maxine Elliott's Theatre last night. There were fourteen characters on an island in the Mediterranean in search of a plot, but they couldn't find one.

I would say, off-hand, that this is Mr. Rosenthal's first play and that he has taken it quite seriously because it includes considerable autobiographical data.

Its most coherent theme is that of genius thwarted by family handicaps. I think I heard some such line as "They strangle their sons with umbilical cords."

The young man who is left pacing the decks whence all but he had fled is a writer. Stage geniuses are almost always writers. Because the papas who create them and put them into plays are writers, I suppose.

### Boy Has Background

This young man of the play was the offspring of artistic people. His mother would have been a singer if she had not given up

her career to take care of him. His father was a wild writing lad who became a famous playwright with iron grey hair and a philosophy of life that was much more helpful to others than it was to him.

When the boy is 19 his father and mother, who had separated when he was three months old, meet on an island in the Mediterranean and resume a discussion they had started in West Eleventh street 19 years before—mostly about the rights of the individual in living his own life.

They are still unable to agree, but having mellowed and lost something of their old egotism they manage to do the boy a good turn by letting him stay on the island and have a go at working out his own destiny.

### Also Present

There are quite a number of other people ready to feed the story at intervals. A British army officer retired without his consent. A flippant actress with comedy lines ("How did you sleep, dear?" "Alone.") A disheartened painter and the wife who has interfered with his career. A young girl who is going to work and work and work until she makes something of her music. A flashy title or two.

These seem rather futile appendages moving restlessly about a handsome Harry Horn setting. They follow the Chekhovian pattern but never catch up with it.

Onslow Stevens, a solid sort as a leading man, is the unknown father and Vera Allen the mother of the eager boy, played with some sensitiveness by George Lloyd.

Mary Howes is an attractive mane toser and Zita Johann has not more than a few minutes to remind us of how pleasant an actress she is. Dennis Hoey adds weight as the English soldier man and Edith King fits in snugly whenever she can find an opening.

Mr. Rosenthal's second play will, I'm sure, be better than his first.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, March 2, 1940

## The Burning Deck Leaves Critic Cold

### Tangled Lives Tangle Play Into a Dreary Puzzle

NO matter where Andrew Rosenthal, who wrote it, stands on The Burning Deck, which had us out on a false alarm call at Maxine Elliott's last evening, it, at any rate, is in knee pants and full of blisters. Heaven knows what Mr. Rosenthal is thinking about, getting to or driving toward in what we will back against all comers as the windiest and wackiest three acts of the last season. Perhaps heaven and Mr. Rosenthal do; this playgoer admits he is licked.

Maybe when old Capt. Applegate, who has been drinking heavily all evening, shows up somewhere in the third act to querulously murmur, "Is everything returning to abnormal?" he is summing it all up. For the captain is positively right. Earlier the play had threatened for a flickering moment to make sense, throwing everything out of joint, but the moment passed and all was unintelligible again in Mr. Rosenthal's little insensible world.

A play of tangled lives—that is what it must have been. Tangled lives all intertwining on the Cote d'Azur, which, in case you don't happen to get around, is a slick way of saying that the play takes place somewhere along the Mediterranean coast. The water is beautifully blue in that part of the world, the people are quaint and the air is serene.

But what are you going to do when a fashionable London playwright suddenly runs into the wife and son he hasn't seen in 20 years and his boy wants to be a playwright too. When the Baroness sits around the veranda sharpening a viper's tongue on all but dear Niki. And the old captain is getting constantly drunk. And the artist and his wife are

tormented because he wants to go back to Greenwich Village and she wants to move up to Park Ave. When the girl with the shapely legs can't make up her mind about love or finishing that piano concerto and the aging actress is discovering new circles under her eyes. The sky is blue and so is the Mediterranean (beg pardon, the Cote d'Azur), but you can see how much whisky and soda and puerile playwrighting can go into so many tangled lives.

What we can't see even on this clear night is how such able and eminent players as Onslow Stevens, Zita Johann, Russell Hardie and Edith King become involved in such insipid antics, and in lieu of a reasonable understanding there is little left to do but to commiserate with them for the distress to which they have been put in such shoddy circumstances.

Anyway, there was nothing ablaze at Maxine Elliott's last night. It was a false alarm.

GEORGE ROSS.

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# "Leave Her to Heaven"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, February 28, 1940

## Ruth Chatterton Returns in 'Leave Her to Heaven,' at the Longacre

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

MISS Ruth Chatterton, who has been for fifteen years in other parts, returned to Broadway last evening, appearing at the Longacre Theater in John Van Druten's "Leave Her to Heaven." The circumstances were not as auspicious as they might have been, Miss Chatterton encountering difficulties with her play, her fellow actors and, for not very clear reasons, her audience. Very few, if any, of the difficulties can be laid to her account.

Mr. Van Druten's play is a serious play about murder which has the unfortunate habit of sometimes appearing to be a melodrama about murder. In it Miss Chatterton is required to impersonate an overgenerous Englishwoman of not quite the best class who falls in love with her chauffeur, a surly youth of arrestingly few charms. He emerges from a fit of the sulks in the second act to kill the lady's husband, a grumpy business man who had aroused his jealousy. In the end, the chauffeur is hanged for the crime and the lady escapes with a reputation so blackened and a spirit so crushed that suicide is her only recourse. This is reportedly based on an actual British murder and is the sort of plot with which anything might be done.

Mr. Van Druten has done neither really well nor altogether badly with it. His script attains no particular emotional intensity. But it never goes resoundingly off the track.

If he overwrites at times, he makes up for it by underwriting at others. By this indication he throws a heavy task on the director, Miss Auril Lee, and the actors. Miss Lee is not quite equal to it and the play quietly deflates, like a tire with a slow leak. There is a long first-act love scene between the lady and the boy—a repetitious and now and then rather embarrassing scene. Miss Chatterton, acting very nicely indeed, and Edmond O'Brien, acting very vigorously, held it together up to the halfway point. Then an uncommonly distractable audience began to giggle and not all Miss Chatterton could do during the rest of the evening brought it again entirely under control. She was, in the circumstances, singularly plucky, but she could neither persuade nor compel. Nobody helped her much. Miss Lee permitted an accumulation of small errors of timing and emphasis. Mr. O'Brien acted with rude violence and unbalanced the play by creating a character so harsh that the lady's love for him took on the appearance of an aberration. Mr. Van Druten's occasionally inadequate lines provided unintentionally comic anti-climaxes.

Miss Chatterton remained through all this simple, appealing and courageous—and, admittedly, lacking that special power which would have made the audience be good. There was excellent playing in small parts by A. G. Andrews, Esther Mitchell, Hilda Plowright and others, and some really moving moments were provided by the acting of young Eldon Gorst. But it was a rather fretting evening.

### 'LEAVE HER TO HEAVEN'

A play in three acts by John Van Druten; directed by Auril Lee; settings by Watson Barratt; presented at the Longacre Theater on February 27, 1940, by Dwight Deere Wiman. The cast:

|                          |                    |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Madge Monckton           | Ruth Chatterton    |
| Robert Ewen              | Edmond O'Brien     |
| Mr. Monckton             | Reynolds Denniston |
| Dr. Collins              | Francis Compton    |
| Mr. Henstridge           | A. G. Andrews      |
| Mrs. Henstridge          | Esther Mitchell    |
| Grace Henstridge ("Hen") | Hilda Plowright    |
| Morgan                   | Edmond Stevens     |
| Davis                    | Guy Spaul          |
| Martin Reardon           | Neil Fitzgerald    |
| Mrs. Lake                | Bettina Cerf       |
| David                    | Eldon Gorst        |
| First Officer            | J. Malcolm Dunn    |
| Second Officer           | William Packer     |
| Mr. Rolleston            | Franklyn Fox       |
| Mrs. Williams            | Margaret Moffat    |
| Mr. Williams             | Lowell Giffords    |
| Rogers                   |                    |

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, February 28, 1940

## Ruth Chatterton Returns to Broadway in John Van Druten's 'Leave Her to Heaven'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

AFTER fifteen years away from Broadway Ruth Chatterton has returned in John Van Druten's "Leave Her to Heaven," which was acted at the Longacre last evening. Mr. Van Druten is also somewhat of a stranger; nothing of his has turned up on Broadway since 1935. Since Miss Chatterton and Mr. Van Druten are both highly regarded in this community it would be pleasant to renew their acquaintance on some rapturous occasion worth hat-tossing and polite bell-ringing. But "Leave Her to Heaven" is only an ordinary sin-and-homicide disturbance. Although Miss Chatterton plays it as amiably and earnestly as possible, the part makes it impossible for her to recapture the enchantments of her stage appearances fifteen or twenty years ago.

When the characters in a drama of human nature seem to be too stupid to be members of intelligent society you can bet that the author is working at something that actually happened. In a program note Mr. Van Druten acknowledges indebtedness to Miss F. Tennyson Jesse who in turn, it is said, had come

across a case like this in the court records of England. It is the story of a friendly, likable married woman who is romantically in love with her young chauffeur. He is a violently jealous lad. In a fit of abnormal anger he murders her husband. She confesses to the murder to save her lover. But he refuses to hide behind her magnanimity. He is sentenced to death. She is freed. But

she cannot escape the wreck of the pleasant world she once dominated.

Since something like this apparently once happened, it is no use crying fraud. Nothing can be too pat to be a report of human experience. But still the impression Mr. Van Druten's play creates in the theatre is, first, of worldly love as the stage used to describe it a quarter of a century ago when sin was irresistible, and, second, of a routine crime story of passion. Mr. Van Druten first came into the theatre with a disarming study of adolescence entitled "Young Woodley"; in succeeding years he subdued unruly theatre-goers with "There's Always Juliet" and "The Distant Shore." But he is writing "Leave Her to Heaven" in a kind of colorless style that makes some parts of it seem like a revival of drama from a day before he was born.

Getting Miss Chatterton back on the Broadway stage has taken some doing these past few months. Playing the part of a scandalous wife is still not exactly her pigeon. She brings to it a gently mannered performance, soft with grace in the love scenes, ruefully submissive after the crime has been committed; and several of the scenes she manages with a good deal of technical versatility. But she is hard to hear in almost every scene, and the part never really comes alive.

Inside an elaborate suite of settings by Watson Barratt, Auril Lee has staged the play competently. Edmond O'Brien, the fiery Prince Hal to Maurice Evans' Falstaff, plays the rebellious lover with more earnestness than glow or spontaneity. The cast includes Hilda Plowright, Francis Compton, A. G. Andrews and Reynolds Denniston. But they all seem like shadows seen through a glass darkly. As characters they are hardly worth Miss Chatterton's or Mr. Van Druten's bothering about.

# "Leave Her to Heaven"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, February 28, 1940

## 'Leave Her to Heaven' Brings Ruth Chatterton Back to B'way

"Leave Her to Heaven," drama by John Van Druten. Produced by Dwight Deere Wiman at the Longacre Theatre, New York, Feb. 27, 1940.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

**N**O MATTER how many years it has been since Ruth Chatterton last played on Broadway, there have been enough of them to make her return an event of consequence and enough to demand of her a bit of courage in facing her old public.

At the Longacre theatre last night appearing in a drama called "Leave Her to Heaven" she personally bridged the years beautifully. She is a better actress today than she was when she went to Hollywood in the middle nineteen twenties, even though the parts they have given her in pictures have been on the drab rather than the inspiring side.

She naturally has greater poise and a more mellowed art, and that suggestion of self-consciousness that threatened to fasten itself upon her as a younger woman has largely disappeared.

The courage that it has taken to accept for this re-entry a play and a part that would have frightened most of her professional sisters is also to her credit as an actress, if not to her better judgment as a star.

She is playing the guilty wife of a man twice her age who has taken up with her chauffeur in the usual search for happiness.

She is, as she says, two women living in the same body, and her efforts to control the pair of them is quite beyond her.

She unintentionally fires the jealousy of the chauffeur, and he does in the husband. After which the wife's progress toward the heaven that her author expects will mete out retribution to her is anything but happy. And anything but appealing.

By all the laws the theatre creates, Miss Chatterton should have insisted upon a sympathetic role with which to make her Broadway return. Audiences, even the experienced audiences of this boastful sector, have to

be profoundly moved by the unsympathetic drama to give an actress of its dominating character her due.

"Leave Her to Heaven" is never profoundly and seldom emotionally moving. Its foundation is theatrical and shallow, however true it may be to those familiar first page stories of abnormal ladies and their young lovers.

### Wasted Theatre

Being wrong in its foundation there is little chance for it to build sympathy with any series of adventures that follow. And melodrama without sympathy is wasted effort in the theatre.

Dwight Deere Wiman has given John Van Druten's play every chance, casting it wisely, setting it attractively. Miss Chatterton, as said, realizes skillfully and completely the attractions and the weaknesses of the shallow heroine. Edmond O'Brien plays with a nice shading of character the emotionally enslaved chauffeur.

There are excellent supporting performances by Reynolds Denniston, Hilda Plowright, A. G. Andrews, Esther Mitchell and Francis Compton. And a juvenile bit for Edmond Gorst which brings him the audience's heartiest approval.

"But 'Leave Her to Heaven' is still obviously a made play. Miss Chatterton is going to have a difficult time overcoming this handicap. It will not, I trust, discourage her from trying again.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, February 28, 1940

## Leave Her to Heaven New Play at Longacre

Miss Chatterton Is Starred in 'Detailed' Horror Story

**P**ERHAPS John Van Druten grew so weary of hearing people say "how charming" in connection with some of his recent plays that he chose to write one which would be safe from the deadly adjective. If so, he has nothing to worry about. No one is going to accuse him of charm in his *Leave Her to Heaven* which Dwight Deere Wiman presented and Ruth Chatterton chiefly acted out at the Longacre last evening.

Quite the opposite. For Mr. Van Druten has whipped together a shilling shocker—the macabre kind that is said to so delight the English heart and morbid curiosity. If you are letting the children out at night, Pinocchio still is their cup of tea.

A deftly conceived horror play is one thing—and a shilling shocker is another—and *Leave Her to Heaven* is under no pretense about being in any but the latter category. Mr. Van Druten doesn't omit any of the sordid details, even going deeply into some items of a crime with passion that a criminal courts reporter might sometimes be inclined to overlook to avoid sensationalism. Credit him with a thorough job, anyway—on the side of unvarnished tabloid journalism—even to the co-defendant's sickening grimace when the body is found.

All the angles of the case are covered, however grim. Whether based in fiction or

founded on fact at Old Bailey, here is the dossier on the murder: a married woman is having, as they say in the half-reticent accounts, an illicit liaison with her chauffeur in a hotel in London. He speaks with a cockney accent and is full of jealousy about her husband. The thought of his mistress and her husband going away together is more than he can bear, so he bashes the poor gentleman's head in with a mallet. When the inspector arrives, she owns up to the crime and apprised of her confession, so does he. Hers is withdrawn and he is sentenced to hang, but the dispute of her extra-marital relations pursue her so relentlessly that

she kills herself a moment or two before the audience is left to the heavenly and comparatively fresh air of 45th St. And from the foregoing you can well imagine that *Lady Chatterton's Lover* was the cheapest wisecrack you could buy between acts at the Longacre last evening.

If the audience edged up to the front of its seats last night, expectantly awaiting a melodramatic surprise, it was doomed to disappointment. For Mr. Van Druten is being as wholly repertorial as a courtroom stenographer in his theatrical statement of the case. There are no psychological complications, no fuss about the identity of the guilty party, only a sordid unravelling of a sordid story, much of which is as trite as the report in the police blotter.

Under the circumstances, Miss Chatterton cannot evoke much glamour from the part she is called upon to play. There is no glamour in her Madge Monckton, but a dis-solutesness that gains little sympathy from across the footlights. Suicide, in any event, seems the logical end of such a character whose chief virtue at any point of the drama is by no means a pleasant or amiable personality. As a snare for the lover of coarse manners, Edmond O'Brien strikes just about the same unendearing chord and it must be admitted that because no one seemed sorry to see him go, Mr. O'Brien faithfully fulfilled the role. As a devoted friend and housekeeper, Hilda Plowright adds an appropriate, melancholy air to the grim proceedings and Eldon Gorst works up a fine, emotional frenzy in the short span he has to commiserate with Miss Chatterton in the visiting room of the prison. Harry Solern and Margaret Moffat add to the performance their characterizations of an elderly British couple that are as British as tea and crumpets.

But Mr. Van Druten's passion-crime is too clinical for satisfactory entertainment. He is vastly more entertaining when he is being—er—"charming."

GEORGE ROSS



# "Leave Her to Heaven"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, February 28, 1940

## "Leave Her to Heaven" Opens at the Longacre

By WILLELLA WALDORF

RUTH CHATTERTON, who has been absent from the Broadway stage for fifteen years, returned last night with an English accent in a dreary play by John van Druten entitled "Leave Her to Heaven," presented by Dwight Deere Wiman at the Longacre Theatre. As far as we have been able to discover, this particular work of Mr. van Druten's has not been produced in London, so it is not possible in this instance to remark upon the folly of Broadway importing West End successes. Either the West End didn't care enough about "Leave Her to Heaven" to produce it, or the war came along just in time. In either case the London theatre is one up on Broadway.

Mr. van Druten, who has written such things in the past as "There's Always Juliet," "The Distaff Side," and "Young Woodley," is concerned with a murder in "Leave Her to Heaven." For his title he turns to the scene between Hamlet and his father's Ghost:

"Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul converse  
Against thy mother aught: leave her to heaven.  
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge,  
To prick and sting her."

### Murder Most Foul

This murder, however, is hardly a tragedy in the grand manner, but a News-of-the-World story from Westcliff-on-Sea, where

Madge Monckton, married to a sour-visaged crab considerably older than herself, is carrying on a love affair with the chauffeur, Bob Ewen, who is, on the other hand, considerably younger than his mistress. As the affair progresses, Bob becomes more and more jealous, and when the Moncktons decide to go away for a couple of days' visit with friends, the chauffeur, in a fit of annoyance, fetches a blunt instrument from the car and taps Mr. Monckton over the head, offstage. When he tells Mrs. Monckton what he has done she utters the customary shriek and pours herself a stiff brace from her favorite bottle. Mrs. M., in fact, though a devoted wife and mother, drinks a bit too much for her own good and by the time the

police have tramped around the premises for a while with open notebooks, she has got herself so tight that she says she did the tapping herself.

When Bob discovers that his Madge has tried to shoulder the blame, albeit in her cups, he dashes off to give himself up, and there's the local constabulary with two murderers on its hands for only one tapping. The devoted wife and mother, on sobering up at the station house, sticks to her story for Bob's sake, but the pleas of her 15-year-old son caused her to weaken a bit, and in the end . . . well, leave her to heaven, as the Ghost so charmingly put it.

### No Courtroom Scene

The only possible reason for going all over a case such as this—and no doubt Mr. van Druten has taken his facts from a court record somewhere—is the possibility of delving into the facts behind the crime and revealing some fascinating psychological study in the fashion of the Mrs. Belloc Lowndes school of murder literature. But Mrs. Monckton, as Mr. van Druten reveals her, is a silly fool of a woman in whom it is impossible to stir up much interest even with the shadow of the gallows hanging over her.

The play itself is so uninspired that it almost never manages to whip up even the mildest sort of excitement, even with murder going on and police all over the premises, and sundry little touches which the author and director apparently thought were going to impress the audience as tremendously significant or tragic unfortunately produced only smothered giggles. The only thing we can say in favor of Mr. van Druten this time is that he spared us a courtroom scene.

There is no mystery element in "Leave Her to Heaven" except Miss Chatterton's mysterious decision to return to Broadway in it after so long an absence. She still looks remarkably youthful and indicated last night that she might be delightful in a nice light comedy.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, February 28, 1940

## Death and Dullness

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IT IS one of the duller murders that Mr. John van Druten is contemplating in his new play. Perhaps the police annals of recent years record a less interesting and more commonplace homicide than the taking-off of poor old Mr. Monckton, who was bashed over the head by his chauffeur, but I am seriously inclined to doubt it. For some unknown reason, however, this particular slaughter attracted Mr. van Druten enough to cause him to bring his frequently striking talents to bear on it and interested the customarily astute Mr. Dwight Wiman enough to persuade him to produce the resulting play. For that matter, there was something about the case that made

Miss Ruth Chatterton, after fifteen years away from the New York stage, unable to resist the call of the local footlights any longer, when she was given the chance to appear in a dramatization of the affair. It is all a great puzzle to me, and I imagine that this morning it will be to Mr. van Druten, Mr. Wiman and Miss Chatterton, too.

If they are to be at all absorbing in the theater, homicides should be mysterious or

terrifying or soul-satisfying or given to remarkable psychological aspects of one sort or another. The case chronicled so painstakingly in "Leave Her to Heaven" has none of these things to render it entertaining. Here is the commonplace and unrelievedly sordid tale of the love affair between Mrs. Monckton and her boyish chauffeur, a romance that so aroused the young fellow that, in an outburst of jealousy, he bent the

unoffending Mr. Monckton to death with a mallet. Well, the killing seems to have surprised Mrs. Monckton a little bit, so she took a few drinks and then said that she had done the slaying herself. The chauffeur differed with her and they were both taken off to jail and then, when she saw her boy David, Mrs. Monckton decided to defend herself and she was acquitted and the chauffeur was hanged and she stabbed herself. And that, so far as I could discern, was all there was to "Leave Her to Heaven."

Just what Mr. van Druten wanted to prove by telling us this particular story at such length, I will never be able to tell you. It isn't dramatically impressive, it hardly purges us with either pity or terror and it doesn't offer any psychological truths of any moment. As a matter of fact, it doesn't provide any important opportunities for acting, either—despite the earnest efforts of Miss Chatterton, Edmond O'Brien and the other conscientious members of the cast. The playwright has written a few scenes that were no doubt intended as heartbreaking stuff, but he is just as unsuccessful in this particular endeavor as he is in everything else about "Leave Her to Heaven." In bitter truth, the new play is about as dull, feeble and generally unappetizing as anything the theater has offered us this season, and, heaven knows, it has offered us some dismal items. Don't ask me to tell you anything more. I am feeling pretty discouraged at the moment.

# "Another Sun"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, February 24, 1940

## "Another Sun" Would Bring Hope to the Refugee Colony

"Another Sun," drama by Dorothy Thompson and Fritz Kortner. Produced by Cheryl Crawford at the National Theatre, New York, Feb. 23, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

OUT of her experience and her boundless sympathies Dorothy Thompson, internationalist, has spun a story of the refugee colony in New York. Her collaborator is Fritz Kortner, an actor of standing in the German theatre before the collapse. Mr. Kortner, I assume, supplied stage sense and professional suggestions. The result of this collaboration is a plotless play called "Another Sun" that is made appealingly human by the skill and personalities of its players and irritatingly vague by the perfection of their accents.

Which is to say that the auditor, understanding not nearly as much of the spoken text as he is eager to understand, still feels himself rewarded and interested because of the likableness and sincerity of the actors and the holding quality of the tragedy they relate.

### From Vienna

"Another Sun" reveals the familiar situation of a stranded and bewildered group of aliens. Cast from their respective fatherlands; searching the earth for a home and understanding; losing faith in a God in whom they have long put their trust, they huddle together and hope desperately for a change of fortune.

This particular group is of an intelligence and cultural background above the average. One or two are actors of the first grade. One

a college professor. One the wife of a defiant patriot held in a German concentration camp. Their own particular reunion in New York brings them into contact with such a pair of newspaper workers as Miss Thompson would know about. Together they struggle for a mastery of the English tongue. Together they canvas the situation for jobs.

Together they suffer in their pride and in their blasted hopes. And together they face the tragedy of a radioed report of the fall of Vienna and the blasting of their last hope of a return to the lives they knew before.

### Drama Builds

One of their number, a Russian actor, dies on the eve of Vienna's fall. The wife of the

patriot imprisoned and liquidated in Germany gives birth in America to his son.

In the end there is a tightening of drama as compromises are spurned and life in the new land is faced. "For exile they change their homes and pleasant thresholds to seek a country lying beneath another sun," as the program quotes Virgil.

Chief among the players is an engaging and handsome young man named Hans Jaray, a continental favorite in former days and a player of finished skill. His struggle with the new language is progressing, but still has some distance to go.

### Americans Help

Helping with notable success is Kate Wariner, playing a wholesome American with fine understanding and warming sympathy. Other exiled players include Celeste Holm, a pleasant Viennese who has played for some time in America; the adopted Leo Bulgakov, who last night was more clouded than usual as to speech; Johanna Hofer and Adrienne Gessner, two other tried and capable continental actresses, and the always dependable Arnold Korff.

McKay Morris gives a nice dignity to an exiled churchman. Herbert Rudley plays a newspaper man with the usual alcoholic trimmings and abundant good nature. Marshall Bradford does well by an Italian professor.

A nice apartment interior by Ben Edwards, and a carefully detailed staging by Mr. Kortner. If the producer, Cheryl Crawford, will take personal charge of rehearsals today, helping to point up and clarify the speech of her visiting players, I'm sure the result will be appreciated by future audiences.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, February 24, 1940

## New World

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

MISS DOROTHY THOMPSON, the seeress, and Fritz Kortner, the German actor, have written an earnest and heartfelt play about the sorrows and trials of exiles in an alien world. Since Miss Thompson's column is noted, among other things, for its dramatic power, and Mr. Kortner has a vast technical knowledge of the theater, it had been hoped that their stage collaboration would result in a drama of power, eloquence and distinction, combining thoughtfulness with high emotion. But the theater is a tricky medium, given to a shameless betrayal of those who try most earnestly to aid it, and "Another Sun," for all its fine, flaming intentions, offers neither the passionate force that we had all hoped for from Miss Thompson nor the theatrical skill we had expected from Mr. Kortner. The sincerity and indignation of the authors give their play moments of dignity, but, on the whole it is a work that shows unhappily little aptitude for the theater.

"Another Sun" covers pretty much the same ground that the Austrian refugee actors touch on in their intimate revue, "Reunion in New York." In fact, with two of its scenes ending with a stageful of exiles singing nostalgic songs of their lost homeland, the Thompson-Kortner play seems upon occasion merely a more lengthy version of some of the sketches in the revue. Here the authors are contemplating the broken career of one George Berndt, a handsome young Germanic player of classic roles, who has gone into voluntary exile in protest against the treatment of a great German poetic dramatist

named Lens, in whose plays he had acted. Berndt's frivolous young wife hates America and is trying to persuade her husband to resign and return to Germany, while the sketchiness of his English makes it impossible for him to continue his career in America. The period covered is that just prior to and following the taking of Austria, which somehow seems so many decades ago, but the matter of the idealistic exile has not lost its importance by any means with the passing of time. It is the inexactness of the playwrights' dramatic imagination that has injured their play.

In the end, of course, the young actor refuses with scorn the offer of the German authorities to let him return to the land of his birth, even though it means that his wife will leave him. Lens has been due to death in a concentration camp, but Lens's son has been

born in America, and the great man's plays are to be done in New York, with George Berndt playing their leading roles. The plot, however, is a desultory one, used chiefly as a framework for the authors' views on the general plight of the exile, the state of this chaotic world and the hope of America. Everything Miss Thompson and Mr. Kortner have to say is fine and noble, and they write with such valiant fervor that their message should have proved a ringing one in the theater. The unpleasant truth is, however, that "Another Sun" is so desultory in its dramatic action, so hysterical in much of its emotion, so lacking in force and power and so given to unfortunate dramatic clichés that it rarely achieves either life or true feeling. The characters, too, are less vivid than they should have been, and while Miss Thompson obviously knows her exiles, her play indicates that she is less certain about newspaper men. Her valiant American reporter hardly came from any of the local city rooms.

The leading role is attractively played by a Viennese actor named Hans Jaray, who is likely to have considerably more success in the local theater than "Another Sun" seems destined for. Miss Celeste Holm, who left her role of the mysterious lady in Mr. Saroyan's "The Time of Your Life" to play the shallow wife in the Thompson-Kortner work, manages effectively enough, and that fine actor Arnold Korff comes on in the last act for a moment as a German consular official with a secret hatred of Hitlerism. As always, he is of great help to the play. Herbert Rudley, who was so good in "The World We Make," is naturally baffled by the incredible role of the dashing reporter who has to persuade audiences he is a newspaper man by adding "quote" and "unquote" to most of his speeches and by getting drunk in the second act. The other roles are pleasantly played, with Miss Adrienne Gessner handling a convincing bit as one of the exiles. "Another Sun" will have to be set down as a grave disappointment.

# "Another Sun"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, February 24, 1940

## 'Another Sun,' Anti-Nazi Play, Opens at the National Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

DOROTHY THOMPSON and Fritz Kortner joined the playwrights' war against despotism last evening, attacking on the dramatic front with a play called "Another Sun," which opened at the National Theater. And, like their predecessors in this unending fight, they carried the banner of human rights, raised their voices in the most stirring battle cry of our time—and employed pop-guns as armament.

It begins to appear improbable that Hitler will be unseated by the New York theater.

Miss Thompson, who is so vigorous in print, and Mr. Kortner, an actor of reputation in his native Germany, approach their theme with evident feeling. They write of oppression abroad as it is reflected in the lives of a small group of exiles living in New York. Most of the exiles are German, but one is Russian and one Italian. All have been driven from the homelands because they would not bend their minds to the iron fists. The chief character is a German actor, driven from the Reich because he refused to close a liberal play at official command. His flutery wife has come along, and wishes she hadn't.

The play ambles in slow circles around this fixed point. The actor and his friends try to extricate the author of the censored play from concentration camp. The author's wife joins them, coming to New York to bear her baby. They hear on the radio of Hitler's march into Vienna. The actor struggles to learn English, so that he may act again and two American foreign correspondents—one apparently a refugee from "Front Page" and the other an idealistic girl reporter—give the aliens advice and aid. The actor discovers he may still return if he will recant, hesitates, stormily re-

### 'ANOTHER SUN'

A play in three acts by Dorothy Thompson and Fritz Kortner; staged by Mr. Kortner; setting by Ben Edwards; costumes by Paul du Pont; presented by Cheryl Crawford at the National Theater on February 23, 1940. The cast:

|                     |       |                   |
|---------------------|-------|-------------------|
| George Berndt       | ..... | Hans Jaray        |
| Maria (his wife)    | ..... | Celeste Holm      |
| Sergel Volkonsky    | ..... | Leo Bulgakov      |
| Guglielmo Benedetto | ..... | Marshall Bradford |
| Susan Van Ryn       | ..... | Kate Warriner     |
| Cliff Jackson       | ..... | Herbert Rudley    |
| Christina Lens      | ..... | Johanna Hofer     |
| Pastor Reisinger    | ..... | McKay Morris      |
| Prof. Friedman      | ..... | Erwin Kalsner     |
| Franzle             | ..... | Adrienne Gessner  |
| Von Bendow          | ..... | Arnold Korff      |

fuses when he learns that the dramatist has been killed. The German consul, after clearing the room, unexpectedly congratulates him.

These and other incidents proceed at a crawl. The play is awkwardly, aimlessly written, missing almost all the excitement inherent in its theme. Aspiring epigrams turn to clichés, and a cliché is little more palatable for being buttered on the right side. The direction is, if possible, even more inept. The scenes are almost always static, always out of focus. During all of the first act, and at moments in the second and third, the actors are permitted to play down to a whisper.

It is difficult to assay acting under conditions so untoward. Hans Jaray, an Austrian making his debut here, appears to have a latent incisiveness which is lost in the prevailing apathy. Leo Bulgakov is inventive, but eerily inaudible. Kate Warriner plays the role of the newspaper girl unassumingly and McKay Morris is moderately forceful amid uncertainty. But the acting is, by and large, no more memorable than the play.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, February 24, 1940

## Dorothy Thompson and Fritz Kortner Examine the Refugee Problem in 'Another Sun'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ALTHOUGH Dorothy Thompson has mastered most of the current mediums of expression, she was never cut out for the stage. This seems like a reasonable statement of fact on the basis of a play she has just conspired in. "Another Sun," which was put on at the National last evening, is signed by her and Fritz Kortner, one-time leading German actor and now an exile from tyranny. They are writing about the plight of the German refugee in New York. In the alarms she sends out three times a week in her syndicated column Miss Thompson occasionally discusses this subject out of knowledge and Cassandra-like premonition, and presumably Mr. Kortner knows about it at first hand. But there's no use pretending that "Another Sun" is anything but a static and prolix drama. Miss Thompson's and Mr. Kortner's sun has difficulty in rising and no particular interest in setting before bed-time.

At least as they tell it, the problem is undramatic. For the tragedy in life, as well as the difficulty on the stage, is that nothing happens. In the first act in 1938 the great German

Hamlet and his pretty wife are already in New York. She learned the English language in her youth and is acting on the American stage. But his English is halting and barbaric. A master of German, he is tongue-tied in English, and accordingly a lonely, tragic figure, denied the use of the profession he honored abroad. In the midst of a household of refugees with two American newspaper people as friends, he sits quietly at home, doom already settling around his shoulders, talking and

wondering. All that is bitterly true. And it is anything but dramatic.

"Another Sun" is too circumstantial to have been invented. There is the Russian refugee, doleful reminder of a previous invasion that seemed heart-breaking at the time. There is an Italian refugee who, after two years, is delivered by an appointment at Columbia. There is also the tragic figure of a wife who has left her husband in a German concentration camp and gives birth to his child in a New York apartment. All the scheming, all the desperate hoping for assistance, all the wishing that the German oppressor will be overthrown are doubtless painful realities in the bleak life of an exile. But still a playwright has to make a living play out of them. What seems dead in a man's heart has somehow to be translated into the life of a stage drama.

Serving as his own director Mr. Kortner has not helped the play much in his scattered and restless direction. Hans Jaray, a Venetian exile, acts the chief part with patient lassitude in a pleasant voice that is almost uninfected. As the Russian refugee, Leo Bulgakov gives another sharp, fully articulated performance that shows what a creative actor can do with poor material. Johanna Hofer, who is Mrs. Kortner in private life, gives the play its one dramatic moment by the agony of a scream over a piece of music that stirs horrible memories. As wife of the leading character, Celeste Holm acts an unpleasant part with considerable initiative. Other parts are pleasantly acted by Arnold Korff, Kate Warriner, Marshall Bradford, McKay Morris, Herbert Rudley, Adrienne Gessner and Erwin Kalsner.

But the direction is at loose ends in a drama that never starts marching across the stage. Miss Thompson and Mr. Kortner have found very little that is dramatic in what is probably authentic material.



# "Another Sun"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, February 24, 1940

## "Another Sun" Arrives

Dorothy Thompson Turns Playwright

By WILLELLA WALDORF

**D**OROTHY THOMPSON, who has not hitherto found time in her crowded life for play writing, and Fritz Kortner, a noted exile from the German theatre, have collaborated on "Another Sun," presented by Cheryl Crawford last night at the National Theatre after a postponement from last Tuesday. All of these persons command respect in their various fields, and the subject of the play is one that fires the imagination, for "Another Sun" is concerned with the plight of artists whose integrity is so unshakable that they are forced to start all over again in a strange country, in a new language, renouncing in mid-career a homeland that has ceased to be free.

Miss Thompson and Mr. Kortner have taken their title from Virgil's Georgics: "For exile they change their homes and pleasant thresholds to seek a country lying beneath another sun." The chief character is Germany's leading Hamlet, an actor—an Aryan actor—who refused to abandon a fine drama by the poet Arnold Lens on order from the Nazi government. He kept it running as long as he could, and inevitably landed in America a short time after making the gesture, accompanied by his wife, an actress not as great as he, but still an actress.

"Another Sun" begins in their New York flat in the winter of '38. The wife, having had an English governess in her youth, and still possessing a pretty face, is able to get something secondary to do on the New York stage, but her husband is unable to master English sufficiently to act in it. "How the brain shrinks in a foreign language," he tells his neighbor, Volkonsky, the exiled theatre owner from Moscow, whereupon Volkonsky, in guttural tones, magnanimously offers to give him English lessons.

For almost ten minutes last night this reviewer was boiling with hope that something pretty fine was coming of all this, but by the time all of the people intended to occupy seats in our vicinity had finally reached them, we had begun to realize that after the

opening English lessons were over, "Another Sun" was rapidly becoming a confused medley of accents, amplified by inept play writing, and hampered by direction that served only to heighten the unfortunate effect.

### Introducing Hans Jaray

The company gathered in for this work was for the most part competent, often much more than that, and whatever may become of "Another Sun," it has served to establish on Broadway a Viennese actor of uncommon good looks, personality and charm. Hans Jaray has not the slightest difficulty in making himself understood in a strange language, and his demeanor, gestures and acting style are simple, unostentatious, never overdone, yet remarkably expressive.

Mr. Jaray, playing the role of George Berndt, Germany's leading Hamlet who left the country when Arnold Lens, his friend and dramatist, was thrown into a concentration camp, is pictured in the play as unable to get a job of any sort in New York because he is unable to think quickly enough in English, even after exhaustive study. He is tempted by an offer of a reprieve from Germany and urged by his light-minded wife to return to the scene of their former triumphs, but nobly tears up the paper giving him leave

to go back to Dictatorship. It is indicated that the best even his newspaper reporter friend can do for him is a \$40-a-week job on the radio, making animal noises.

The fact of the matter is that Mr. Jaray could walk on the stage, smile, and say "Moo, Moo," and immediately become a matinee idol. He is too good an actor to become merely a matinee idol, but what we are getting at is the fact that it is difficult to believe the main plot thread of "Another Sun" on this account, and even more difficult to swallow some of the rest of it, for it is, in the main, a dull, inept, piece, and often embarrassing to boot.

### Hitler Invades Austria

At long intervals a moderately stirring scene unfolds. You can't listen to a radio on the stage announcing the German invasion of Austria without seething for a few seconds even if the scene itself is poorly developed, and when Germany's great Hamlet refused the offer of a pardon from the representative of the Consulate, it was momentarily exciting, even though the audience, pining for an opportunity to show its sentiments were in the right place, vociferously ruined the climax by a burst of applause at precisely the wrong moment. In the end, when the reporter hailed Arnold Lens, Jr. (aged a couple of weeks), in his go-cart, as a free-born American another demonstration took place. The baby never moved.

In addition to Mr. Jaray who was unflinchingly delightful as the actor trying to learn our puzzling language, even if we couldn't quite believe he would have a hard time finding a job, Leo Bulgakov gave a splendid performance of Volkonsky, the Russian theatre owner who was always looking forward to going back some day to put on "The Lower Depths." Arnold Korff made an unforgettable figure in his few minutes on the stage as the representative from the Consulate, and the rest fared now well, now ill, as the play ran its uneven course.

Curiously enough, even when dealing with events definite and uncontroversial, "Another Sun" never quite managed to seem quite convincing. Its stage tricks were often so clumsily contrived that it was even difficult to believe Hitler had invaded Austria. And curiously enough, the character we had the greatest difficulty in swallowing without a gulp was the newspaper reporter, Cliff Jackson, who kept saying "Unquote" all through the first act, but fortunately gave it up later on when the cognac appeared. But it was difficult to believe in Cliff as a newspaper reporter even when he was tight, which will give you an idea of what we were up against last night at the National.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, February 24, 1940

## Another Sun Depicts Exiles' Plight

**U**NDoubtedly there is a fine and stirring play to be written about the plight of exiles in America, but, speaking strictly for the record, the Dorothy Thompson-Fritz Kortner opus, Another Sun, presented at the National last evening, certainly isn't it, for all its good and noble intentions.

When Miss Thompson is fuming indignantly against Nazi bestiality in her column or when she is pleading the cause of refugees she is famed for her incisive clarity and passionate conviction. But the theater is not her preserve, and even with Mr. Kortner's active co-operation the ideas in Another Sun flounder in a sea of vague and inconclusive statements.

### Trials of Refugees

If the themes in Another Sun were new or up for discussion for the first time it would have been less of a bore. But Miss Thompson and Mr. Kortner are going over old ground; they are dramatizing the anguish of involuntarily transplanted Europeans. And they are going over the ground only on its mere surface, for none of the

characters in Another Sun shine through the writing except superficially.

If the play were not of such loose construction it would be easier to follow the general outline. But the plot is so often left dangling by its shirrtaills from the stage that one is never quite sure what Miss Thompson and Mr. Kortner are trying to prove that has not already been proved. What they are trying to say is that it is painfully difficult for exiles to acclimate themselves to their new

line in a new country. But they point this up not too convincingly.

For you get the idea that the major tragedy in Another Sun is that of the German actor who is on the brink of futility because he cannot master enough English for even a normal conversation with a restaurant waiter or drug-store clerk. Now to some of us who watched the Viennese mummers having their reunion in New York a few nights ago at the Little this promise seems a trifle absurd, for there are folk who picked up the tongue rapidly enough to speak it admirably in public. If that is the crux of the problem in Another Sun, then it had best be resolved by a short course at the Berlitz School or under a good language coach instead of tedious and dragging second and third acts.

### Mixed Cast

Mr. Kortner's leisurely direction has not helped matters along either, for it is not superior to a clumsy script and time drags heavily as the play crawls slowly along. Under the disadvantageous circumstances the mixed cast of American and foreign players does yeoman service to keep up a pretense of animation.

You will find such seasoned veterans as McKay Morris, Arnold Korff and Leo Bulgakov doing their part by the proceedings, and in a Viennese newcomer named Hans Jaray the authors have discovered an actor of accomplished talents and great personal charm. **GEORGE ROSS.**

# "Night Music"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, February 23, 1940

## Clifford Odets Chronicles Young Love In 'Night Music,' at the Broadhurst

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

**B**OY meets girl in the theater this season and together they meet New York. They meet with a difference in Clifford Odets's "Night Music," which opened at the Broadhurst last evening, and a philosophic detective chaperones them through the maze. They and those they meet have that odd, intense individuality which people have in the Odets world, where old men mumble their life stories eagerly on park benches and angry husbands reveal their domestic tribulations furiously in hotel lobbies.

But they are boy and girl all the same, and telling of them has mellowed Mr. Odets. "Night Music" is easygoing beyond any of his plays, and it is focused on individuals rather than on theme. It straggles a little here and there and is, I think, minor Odets; it is also crankily alive and full of pungent dialogue and often very funny. Now and then, too, it is more simply moving than Odets's plays often are and the characters, for all their idiosyncrasies, are rather easier to know. A lot of them, however, are mighty odd people, and the hero is one of the oddest.

He is a hungry, angry young Greek-American, whose predicaments are as singular as his temperament. He is taking a couple of monkeys to Hollywood at the start, and one of them makes a grab at the necklace of a pretty girl. In the turmoil young Steve Takis loses his airplane ticket and his wallet, mislays his monkeys and meets the girl. And when, released, he pursues her angrily, he gets knocked down by a stage hand, inherits a fox fur of doubtful lineage and falls bitterly in love.

The girl is an actress in flight from Philadelphia, respectability and a collar-and-suit. Chance gathers her and the boy up together, and the elderly detective saunters after them to play providence. They sleep a night on a park bench and wrangle with Philadelphia in a Greek luncheon and always the insecurity of their lives is a shadow accompanying them. The boy is a sensitive, furious

youth, full of bluster and innocence and hung up by the ears. He voices his desperation and anger at the World's Fair and admits love in a musty hotel room. But it is not until he finally loses his job while waiting for a plane at the airport that the girl and the detective teach him to turn back to the city and fight, arm and arm with friends.

The vigor of the play grows out of the boy's character, and the characters of those he meets. He meets those strange, arresting people of the Odets world—sailors and unhappy husbands, suitcase thieves and hurrying fur salesmen and men who talk to themselves. He meets drabs with cats and men walking dogs and drunken men and insane vegetarians, because the people who interest Mr. Odets most are the peculiar ones. Now and then they interest him a little too much, and he lingers over minor idiosyncrasies while his play stalls. But by and large, Mr. Odets's strange people are as interesting as he thinks they are—and probably even more strange than he thinks them.

But "Night Music" does not go much beyond its characters. It is a minor play because it is not shaped to any vital purpose. In its very different, intensely subjective fashion, it is reporting, as its cousin, Elmer Rice's "Two on an Island" is reporting. Ex-

### "NIGHT MUSIC"

A play in three acts by Clifford Odets; incidental music by Hanns Eisler; directed by Harold Clurman; settings by Mordecai Gorelik; presented at the Broadhurst Theater on February 23, 1940, by the Group Theater. The cast:

|                                 |                  |
|---------------------------------|------------------|
| Lieutenant .....                | Tom Tully        |
| Murphy .....                    | Clancy Cooper    |
| Policeman .....                 | John Rustad      |
| Steve Takis .....               | Ella Kasan       |
| A. L. Rosenberger .....         | Morris Carnovsky |
| Fay Tucker .....                | Jane Wyatt       |
| Mrs. Scott .....                | Virginia Stevens |
| Stagehand .....                 | Harry M. Cooke   |
| Beggar .....                    | Charles Thompson |
| Gus-the-Hurrying Salesman ..... | Sanford Meisner  |
| Sailor .....                    | Harry Bratsburg  |
| Mr. George .....                | Roman Bohner     |
| Teddy .....                     | Lou Polan        |
| Marty .....                     | Charles Mendick  |
| Dot .....                       | Ruth Nelson      |
| Mr. Nichols .....               | Philip Loeb      |
| Lily .....                      | Katherine Allen  |
| Sleeping man .....              | David Opatoshu   |
| Roy .....                       | Phil Brown       |
| Little man .....                | William Hansen   |
| Al .....                        | Philip Loeb      |
| Mr. Tucker .....                | Art Smith        |
| Walter .....                    | Will Lee         |
| Eddie Bellows .....             | Walter Coy       |
| Drunken man .....               | Sanford Meisner  |
| Mr. Gilbert .....               | John Stearns     |
| Arnold .....                    | Bert Conway      |
| Attendant .....                 |                  |

cept for its optimistic insistence that youth will be better off if it is not downhearted, "Night Music" has little to say about the world which its author views with such non-conforming eyes. It is a familiar play about unfamiliar people.

Like most plays produced by the Group Theater, it is acted with interest and variety and like almost all designed by Mordecai Gorelik it is visually picturesque. Ella Kasan plays the leading role with sharp vigor and great perception. Morris Carnovsky, who seems never to miss, acts the part of the detective with vast comprehension. Miss Jane Wyatt plays the girl with simplicity and tenderness. A dozen of the Group familiar—Roman Bohner, Philip Loeb, Art Smith and the rest—dart in and out of the many scenes in brilliantly characteristic flashes.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, February 23, 1940

## Odets' Night Music A Tour of Manhattan

### Play Deals With Struggle of Boy, Girl in Indifferent Metropolis

**L**IKE his predecessor, Elmer Rice, at the Broadhurst, Clifford Odets is concerned with two on an island in Night Music which the Group Theater put on there last evening. The island, of course, is Manhattan whose wonders and woes the playwrights seem to be discovering with renewed fervor and affection this season.

But if Mr. Rice has been taking us on a mild and innocent rubber-neck tour of the metropolis in his multi-scene play, Mr. Odets is showing us the town by taking us, figuratively speaking, on a buggy ride. For the night music he hears on the island that lies between the rivers is weird and cacophonous and more than a trifle confusing.

Night Music, as a matter of fact, seems to this playgoer to be the moodiest of Mr. Odets' works. It is composed of so many conflicting moods that frequently the overtones are completely carried away by the obscure and rapid undertones. Its complexity is such that often you cannot be quite sure that Night Music is not the collaboration of Mr. Odets, Mr. Rice and William Saroyan, for it is in turn, plaintive, whimsical, sunny, stark and brooding and at other moments it is safe to be brash enough to say, it is just plain goofy.

Although all of it doesn't seem to jell, what dramatist is better equipped to pick out the sounds in the New York night than Mr. Odets? His ear is acutely attuned to them

and even if you feel that he is frequently off key, you cannot escape the fact that he can weave dialogue with electrifying vitality. He never loses the sound of his bizarre badinage so much as in Night Music, but it wings across the footlights so sinuously that you often are led to wonder where it is all going.

Anyway, the Messrs. Odets and Rice are not far apart in their disillusioned notions about New York. The boy and the girl in Night Music suffer as many setbacks in an indifferent metropolis as were offered by the hapless, innocent twain of Two on an Island. If anything, Mr. Odets approaches the theme with a more melancholy air and an atmosphere of futility hovers over their adventures. He is writing about a bewildered lad with a desperate eagerness for life who is

constantly discouraged from pursuing it. And he introduces a girl, with the same zeal for life and the same puzzlement. From a police station, where he throws them together in company with a kindly and philosophical detective, he takes them on their vagrant rounds to a sordid stage alley, a half-replicable hostelry, to a pair of uninviting rooms upstairs, to a bench in Central Park, a Greek beanery, to the foot of George Washington's massive statue at the World's Fair and the Airport. And in each instance, life gives love and their pursuit of happiness nothing but a kick in the pants. . . . Finally it is the compassionate detective who wakes them to new hope and ambition.

Following the straight line, Night Music's pattern doesn't seem to be vastly different from Mr. Rice's warm and amiable excursion through the Big Town. And yet, if Night Music is said to be less than stirring, it is because Mr. Odets does not follow the straight line, but clutters it with an overwhelming amount of forensic and distorts it with several unconvincing exaggerations of character.

But whatever criticisms may be made of the play, there is nothing but praise to be made for the members of the Group Theater's acting company performing it. As Steve Takis, the boy, Ella Kasan gives an energetic and dynamic account of himself in a brilliant portrayal and in her first association with the Group, Jane Wyatt acquits herself admirably as Fay Tucker, the girl of the bewildered twain. As usual, Morris Carnovsky, in the role of the sympathetic and brooding detective, shows himself to be an actor of vast skill and whether their parts are large or small, other Group players like Sanford Meisner, Roman Bohner, Philip Loeb and Art Smith make them conspicuous and important.

The incidental music by Hanns Eisler at the end of each scene did not impress these ears as much as they must have Mr. Odets' but Mordecai Gorelik's imaginative setting deserves a special line of praise.

GEORGE ROSS.

# "Night Music"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, February 23, 1940

## Odets on an Island

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IN HIS latest play you will find Mr. Odets in a characteristic mood. Once more he is writing with that wry, sullen pity of his about lonely misfits in a callous civilization, and again he brings to his task the insight, gift for characterization, capacity for soaring individual scenes and understanding of embittered, frustrated people that have given him so interesting a position in the American theater. And once more it must be held against him, even by one of his enthusiasts, that he has written a play that is more striking in its parts than as a whole, that he has gone in for unnecessary padding, and that with all his fine talent for capturing a character or an idea in a scene, he still insists on repeating at length what he can say so much more effectively with greater brevity. "Night Music," after the fashion of Mr. Rice's "Two on an Island," is chiefly a sort of paean to Manhattan, and it is almost worthy of your attention and respect.

New York seems to have a way of making even the more indignant playwrights who write about it mellow, and the case of Mr. Odets is no exception. He still is angry and embittered upon occasion, but this time he has, for reasons rather enshrouded in vagueness, taken on a curious optimism. His boy and girl are still jobless and without visible prospects as the play ends, but Mr. Odets cheers them with some of his characteristic eloquence and sends them back to the city rejoicing. But the most striking sign of the Odets mellowness is that the author has now become friendly with cops. The law, as represented by Detective A. L. Rosenberger, is

guide, philosopher and friend for the bewildered hero and the heroine as they stumble through the mazes of a great city, and it is the detective who is the mouthpiece for the more comforting Odets ideas. I can remember a day when the Left Wing playwrights were not so friendly to the police force. In this case, at least, the change is for the better, because, although Detective Rosenberger does talk too much, he usually talks well.

Although, as I have said, "Night Music" shows Mr. Odets in a typical mood, there is to be found in his play from time to time a strange hint of another dramatist. In a word or two, there are moments when he seems to be writing a trifle like Saroyan. There is not enough of it to make him seem imitative, but something of the Saroyan love for picturesque, amiably fantastic characters does en-

liven parts of the play. That strange similarity no doubt arises in part from the fact that Ella Kazan, who plays the boy of the tale, does suggest the author of "The Time of Your Life." Anyway, "Night Music," which has little of the smoothness of "Two on an Island" but more power of imagination, is an episodic tale of a bitter, harsh-tongued young man, and a sensitive young woman who loves him, and a philosophical detective who concerns himself with their troubles. I suspect the dramatist of making his hero just a bit more ungracious than was necessary, despite the boy's inner bitterness, but, as usual, all of the characterizations are credible.

"Night Music" is at its best when it is being observed rather than philosophical. Its brief and inclusive glimpses into the life of a cheap midtown hotel and its account of random talkers in Central Park or a Broadway stage door are admirably done and provide the play with its most striking material. Its story of the tortured romance of the boy and girl is effective, too, but it is here that the new Odets performed for talking too much gets in the way. At least half an hour of good, merciless editing would have been of tremendous value. The acting and production are excellent. Ella Kazan and Morris Carnovsky are two of the ablest actors on the American stage, and they are at their best as the boy and the detective. Miss Jane Wyatt contributes a simple, moving and charming performance as the girl who really puts up with an awful lot from her ungracious boy friend. The minor characters are shrewdly played. Sanford Meisner in a couple of vivid bits—one as a salesman for "hot" furs and the other as a film magnate—is the best of them, but Philip Loeb, Roman Bohnen, Art Smith and Lou Polan are particularly good. "Night Music" does not mark the Odets advance we had all been hoping for, but it is never commonplace.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, February 23, 1940

## Odets's "Night Music" Opens at the Broadhurst

By WILLELLA WALDORF

CLIFFORD ODETS is the latest of the town's playwrights to investigate the boy-meets-girl-in-New-York situation. With "Night Music," presented by the Group Theatre last night at the Broadhurst, he has joined Elmer Rice as leader of the local Youth Movement. Mr. Rice's "Two on an Island" (which recently moved out of the Broadhurst and is now at the Hudson) follows the big city adventures of a girl from New Hampshire who wants to be an actress and a Middle Western boy who writes dramas nobody will buy. The foxy grandpa in their lives is a cynical kindly theatrical producer. Mr. Odets's "Night Music" concerns a girl from Philadelphia who wants to be an actress and a Greek boy from Brooklyn, Mass., engaged in chaperoning monkeys for a film company, who meet by accident at the corner of Broadway and 44th St. and land in a police station. The foxy grandpa in their lives is a kindly detective who believes in the Younger Generation.

"Night Music" is divided into twelve scenes and as a play it is little more than an excuse for Mr. Odets to introduce a succession of neatly etched and often delightful characters who have nothing to do with the case except that they happen to be lounging around the earlily lobby of the Hotel Algiers, or wandering through Central Park. For no particular reason, Mr. Odets even takes his leading trio on a visit to the World's Fair where they sit at the feet of Washington's Statue and discuss life as it is being lived in America in the twentieth century.

### The Group's Cast

The role of Steve Takis, the Greek boy with a chip on his shoulder, is talent for

bombast and uncertainty in his heart, was doubtless written for Ella Kazan, who acts it with spirit and a keen sense of the pungent vitality of Mr. Odets's dialogue at its best. Jane Wyatt is straightforward and charming as the girl who revolts against going back to live in Germantown, while Morris Carnovsky, in a facial makeup faintly suggesting some of the efforts of Boris Karloff, the movie monster, provides his usual satisfactory performance as the detective who is dying of cancer, but prefers to discuss life rather than death.

As they wander around town, sleeping on park benches, hanging around stage doors, or telling the lieutenant all about it at the precinct station, a rare crew of sharply written and cleverly played characters pass by. It is impossible to mention them all, but we particularly remember Philip Loeb as the fellow who is a cigar store clerk instead of an ace song writer because the big fellows are always stealing his tunes; Sanford Meisner as

the side-walk fur salesman and later as the fussy cinema official. Ruth Nelson as the girl with the cat in the hotel lobby and William Hansen as the man with the dog in the park.

### Parade of Characters

As a parade of characters, "Night Music" is entertaining and often very touching, but as a play it sprawls around town without much sense of form or direction, and especially in the over-long second act, threatens to talk itself to death. Mr. Odets often has an uncanny faculty for putting the right word into the right mouth on the stage, and some of his dialogue is little short of brilliant, but he also writes ineptitudes of the first water, and cannot always resist the temptation to turn a neat phrase whether it means anything at the moment or not. His minor characters are almost without exception shrewdly observed and firmly caught. But his leading players are sometimes forced to wade around in a backwash of words merely because Mr. Odets seems to enjoy piling on the verbiage. It is no news to patrons of his earlier works that Odets needs somebody with a blue pencil at his elbow. This time he could not only do with less talk, but his play would benefit from more action and just a wee bit of plot.

The detective who feeds the boy and girl and sees that they get to the World's Fair and otherwise wet-nurses them for the weekend, urges the young man to go out and change the world if he doesn't like the way it is run, but otherwise Mr. Odets is not in what we should call his most revolutionary mood in "Night Music." His penchant for introducing amusing people as he goes along reminds one now and then of the William Saroyan technique in "The Time of Your Life." "Night Music" has about it a symphonic quality often attributed to the works of Mr. Saroyan. The incidental music composed by Hanns Eisler and played by an orchestra somewhere under the stage admirably catches the spirit of the occasion and was generally effective last night in heightening the atmosphere of the performance, which was played against speedily moved settings by Mordcael Gorelik.



# "Night Music"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, February 23, 1940

## "Night Music," Two on an Island, According to Odets

"Night Music," drama by Clifford Odets. Produced by the Group Theatre at the Broadhurst Theatre, New York, Feb. 22, 1940.

★ ★ ★  
By BURNS MANTLE

YOU may recall that in Clifford Odets' story of the unhappy dentist, which was "Rocket to the Moon," the inquisitive father-in-law was often moved to wonder what was happening in the hotel across the way, the windows of which could be seen so plainly from the windows of the dental offices.

That, as I recall it, was the Hotel Algiers. Now, in "Night Music," Mr. Odets has himself taken to wondering. Being a dramatist with good imagination and a fine understanding of people and hotels, he has fashioned a new drama from his conclusions.

Shown by the Group Theatre in the Broadhurst Theatre last night, "Night Music" proves an oddly fascinating bit of urban realism. It is, broadly, another "Two on an Island" in the Odets manner as contrasted with the manner of the current Elmer Rice.

### Romance and Ideas

The difference lies in both the peopling of the plays and the attack of the dramatists. Mr. Rice has indulged the popular playwright's prerogative of becoming modestly sentimental. Mr. Odets holds faithfully to the special significance of poverty and environment.

Mr. Rice uses the background of the city to develop a theatre romance. Mr. Odets uses romance to sharpen his argument for the enlistment of youth in the militant social forces of the future.

Mr. Odets, I have an idea, was also writing

"Night Music" to give his friend, Ella Kazan, of the Group forces a role in which he might further display a talent for characterization that flashed first in the production of "Waiting for Lefty," and has justified the playwright's faith in several succeeding character drawings.

### Boy and Girl

Mr. Kazan discovers a great opportunity to let himself go in the role of a brash and stubborn Greek-American office boy from Hollywood, sent East to pick up a couple of trained monkeys and take them back to the coast. In New York, because one of the monkeys grabs at a lady's necklace, the lad is arrested and held over the week-end while the police are investigating a suspicion that he is a pickpocket with an animal act.

In this adventure he stirs the sympathy of both the arresting detective and the small-part actress whose necklace is involved. The

girl, facing failure in New York, rebelling against returning to the depressing home of her parents in Philadelphia, finds a hint of glamorous adventure in the tall stories of the youth, and casts her love at his feet.

And he, flustered and conscience-stirred, fights both the girl's offer and his own romantic inclinations with bitter resentment against the social forces that have hampered his growth and limited his opportunities. The sympathetic detective, dying of cancer, serves youth as a philosophical but none too confident friend.

### Kazan Scores

The Kazan performance is vivid in its expression of the actor's intense belief in the part and in himself. There is a nicely modulated contrast in the drawing of the befuddled and defiant but inarticulate youth, and the innate integrity which fights for the protection of the girl.

Playing opposite is Jane Wyatt, and she, taking fire from the Kazan intensity, gives a fine reality and an effective touch of feeling to the girl.

Morris Carnovsky is movingly sincere as the philosophical detective and there are a half dozen picturesque and perfectly played short parts, including two by Sanford Meisner and Philip Loeb, as is usual with the Group performances.

Mordca Gorklik has achieved a number of effective scenes, and lighted them well, and there is a curiously effective musical setting by Hanns Eisler that presents, I assume, the shrill overtones of the raucous city.

Harold Clurman's direction is in the spirit of the script, being replete with incidental and illuminating touches. Last night's audience was enthusiastic.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, February 23, 1940

## Group Theatre Produces Clifford Odets's 'Night Music,' or Boy Meets Girl in Gotham

By BROOKS ATKINSON

NOW that Odets writes Hye Saroyan, Doomsday is near. "Night Music," which the Group Theatre put on at the Broadhurst last evening, represents Mr. Odets having the time of his life. He is writing the saga of an explosive boy who meets an admiring girl on a Saturday in an Autumn Manhattan. It is a tale strewn with vivid scenes, peopled with characters of fire and daring. In Ella Kazan it presents one of the most exciting actors in America. For good measure it also offers Jane Wyatt, Morris Carnovsky and a brilliant Group Theatre production. But Mr. Odets, who has always clung to the erratic, is now writing entirely without discipline and listening fondly to the sound of his voice. If all the new playwrights are going to turn into orchestra leaders we shall have to go way back to Henry Arthur Jones and Pinero for a first lesson in drama. Some one has got to make sense about something before long—or Doomsday is near.

Since Mr. Odets has tossed in some "young men arise" speeches at considerable length and noticeable volume he probably at least hopes that he is making sense. Any man who talks long enough is bound to say something to the point. But "Night Music" is really an adventure story about some odd people who happen to be in New York. A messenger boy for a Hollywood studio is trapped over the week-end in New York with

two monkeys urgently needed for a film. He meets a Philadelphia girl who is trying to be an actress. A benevolent detective, who represents the Santa Claus influence, takes an interest in them and tries to keep them together. After sleeping in a park, stumbling around the World's Fair and talking everyone's ear off, they plight their troth in an airport and face the future courageously.

In simple justice to Mr. Odets this review should acknowledge that some of the characters are incandescent and some of the scenes are planned and written with burning intensity. Mr. Odets's galleries of exotists contain many people who can speak like flashes of lightning on the down beat. He

has never written a better scene than the Sunday morning breakfast in a cheap restaurant with two generations feverishly arguing their rights. There are other glowing scenes between the boy and the girl in the frowny hotel where she lives and some comically volatile scenes between touts and tralls in and out of this Gotham cyclorama.

And let us make no mistake about the acting. Under Harold Clurman's direction the best acting organization in this country is offering a superlative performance with some of Mordca Gorklik's most memorable sets. Although Ella Kazan has long been recognized as an excellent actor, he plunges into "Night Music" with extraordinary resourcefulness—acting like an artist released from all bondage, with drive, range and imagination. Jane Wyatt is also acting like an artist; she plays with tenderness inside the frame of a character. As usual, Morris Carnovsky brings character warily alive. And there are excellent performances by Sanford Meisner, Roman Bohnen, Lou Polan, Art Smith, Philip Loeb and Phil Brown. Although the "group method" is a ridiculous as so much solemn mumbo-jumbo, it has produced the best acting company we have. When a script is congenial the Group Theatre can act it to the hilt.

Mr. Odets's manner of writing is congenial. The tornadoes he creates in the form of characters are good for actors. His dialogue, when it is not too grandiose, can be cut into sharp-edged speeches. But a playwright might as well make up his mind about something. First of all, he might decide whether he is a playwright or a boogie-woogie musician. Mr. Odets has been around long enough to improve instead of subside into mannerism; and there is no reason why he should take comfort at this late date from a new playwright who has not yet learned how to use the theatre expertly. "Night Music" is a foolish play by a man of great talent. It is time—high time—for him to awake and sing.

# "Reunion in New York"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, February 22, 1940

## "Reunion in New York" Makes Many Refugees Feel at Home

"Reunion in New York," revue conceived and assembled by Lothar Metz and Werner Michel; music mostly by Andre Singer. Produced by the American Viennese Group, Inc., at the Little Theatre, New York, Feb. 21, 1940.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THE note of novelty in the second of the refugee revues from Vienna, which opened at the Little Theatre last night as "Reunion in New York"—the note of novelty is the welcoming prelude.

If you should enter the theatre anywhere between 8:15 o'clock and 8:45 you will find the stage set as a small and friendly Viennese beer garden.

There are waiters, waitresses, musicians and plain citizens. They serve beer and sing songs. They strain a bit to be ever and ever so natural, and as jolly as possible. Occasionally one gets tight. Occasionally a couple will wander up the aisles, peddling both songs and candy. Very good candy, too.

I suspect if you were there promptly at 8:15 you would find it got a little tiresome by 8:45, but ten or fifteen minutes of it is warming and good fun.

### On the Rail

At 8:45 the girls and boys from Vienna line up along the steamer rail, as they did last year, and sing a sad song about those dear memories they have left behind them, finishing on a happy note proclaiming and glorying in their new freedom.

Thereafter "Reunion in New York," in spirit and quality as entertainment, is much of the same pattern as last year's "From Vienna."

The program, I think, is mostly new as to its different acts. And there are several new names in the list of principals. But the songs they sing and the way they sing them are much the same.

Lotte Goslar is the chief individualist among them. Lotte, you may remember, specializes in travesties of the interpretative dancers. Once she is a woodsprite. Again she is waltz mad. And finally she fades away as a defeatist spinster.

Lotte is gifted in this sort of grotesquerie, and her friends, who were numerous last night, doubtless think of her as one of the

outstanding caricaturists of her particular group.

Paul Lindenberg repeats his "Lesson in English," which has been cleverly expanded. It may be by Ezra Stone, who helped with the staging.

I think it is Leo Weith who does most of the singing in the garden scene, though it may be Anthony Scott. Whoever it is has a pleasant garden baritone.

### Many Sing, Some Dance

It isn't easy to pick them out of the program by name. After all, Viennese comedians are Viennese comedians and Viennese soubrettes are Viennese soubrettes, and seldom the twain doth greatly change.

I recall that Charlotte Krauss sang frequently and pleasantly. And so did Vilmar Kurer. And so, I suspect, did Maria Fichler. Henry Feever gave an amusing account of the Saroyan ego.

The group is given to parlor harmonies around the piano. If there is no piano they are given to parlor harmonies anyway. And this makes for a sort of informal friendliness.

There should be a very numerous public in New York for these refugee entertainers and their entertainment. The enthusiasm after the last night, too, would also indicate that it is a public that will be pleased by most of what they have to offer.

Many travelers have reported liking them in Vienna, and I'm sure they are as good over here as they were over there. And probably better.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, February 22, 1940

## "Reunion in New York" At the Little Theatre

By WILLELLA WALDORF

LAST summer at the Music Box Theatre, a group of young Austrian refugees put on a little show called "From Vienna" that provided an evening of sentiment, Viennese waltzes and some naive but often charming comedy. Interspersed with sketches too long and too tame for a Broadway audience used to the speedy movement of the usual New York revue. The company had an ingratiating quality that tore your heart out and the performance developed a lump the size of an orange in the throat of this reviewer that stuck there all the time we were trying to write a notice with tears dripping into the typewriter.

Last night at the Little Theatre, the same troupe, with some faces missing but also some pleasant recruits, presented "Reunion in New York," designed to show Broadway what they have learned since last June about show business around Times Square. The orange is there, choking us up again, and our typewriter is quietly rustling away.

The Viennese Theatre Group is now the American Viennese Group, Inc., and a determined, but not too determined, effort has obviously been made to cater to local audiences and at the same time to retain the nostalgic quality of the original production. The result is a curious conglomeration of

sketches, song and dance numbers ranging from "Where Is My Homeland?" a musical lament for Austria, Bohemia and Poland, to an amusing take-off on William Saroyan in the brash Broadway manner.

### The Broadway Touch

The Little Theatre is the proper size for a revue of this specialized sort, and the determination to shorten the sketches and maintain a brisker pace is all to the good. Unfortunately, the material, with the exception of a few numbers in the first part of Act 2, is not up to the talents of the company,

and some of the evening is not only inept but now and then downright embarrassing. There is, to be sure, a marked improvement after the intermission, but it is our impression that much of the patter designed to appeal strictly to American audiences is rather obvious and not as funny as its authors think it is.

Now it is possible that the authors are right and that it is the obvious that appeals to Americans. Nevertheless there is a distressing tendency to rely on such things as a repetition of that thoroughly American word "lousy" for laughs, and while last night's audience, intensely well-disposed, dutifully guffawed, we are inclined to wonder if something a bit more witty might not have been a good idea.

### Talented Players

The company outdid itself in performing the sketches, both foreign and domestic, and there is a definite talent there. In a group of very pleasant people, Katherine Matern impressed us as a comedienne to watch. Henry Feever and Fred Lorens have a nice comedy style, and Vilmar Kurer, Maria Fichler and Paul Lindenberg were unfailingly helpful. The entire troupe, in fact, is superior to its material, and often manages to provide some entertaining moments against formidable odds.

Lotte Goslar, who is appearing as guest artiste, is an eccentric dancer who relies to a remarkable extent on bizarre make-up and costuming, not even disdaining a putty nose. Miss Goslar, of whom we had heard much, was disappointing in her earlier numbers, but she, like the revue itself, improved after the intermission.

All of the performers speak English excellently, which is no mean feat, and the curtain rises at 8:15 on an old-time Viennese wine garden. The company entertains informally in this setting until 8:45 when the show proper begins.

# Reunion in New York"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, February 22, 1940

## 'Reunion in New York,' an Intimate Revue, Opens at the Little Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THOSE engaging young refugees from Vienna who made their first appeal to an American audience last summer with a revue called "From Vienna" brought another informal show into the Little Theater last evening. They call this one "Reunion in New York," and it is very like its predecessor—casual, rather appealing, somehow not quite adequate to the large open spaces of a full-sized theater. Perhaps for occasions such as this the audience should sit at tables and the players wander among them.

They try diligently to set up that atmosphere. For fifteen minutes or so before the show proper the boys and girls gather haphazardly on the stage and tune their fiddles and their voices. They come out into the aisles and bestow candies on early comers and they sing with an air of impromptu. But after a while they go into their acts, way up there on the stage, and then the acts seem small and far away. It is disarming, but only at longish intervals is it really much fun. There is, for example, little of moment in the first act, except for a couple of mildly pleasing numbers left over from their earlier show.

Things go better later, as things so often seem to do in intimate revues. There is a piece called "Blitz Carmen" which is spirited, if rather confused, and a lovely spoof of William Saroyan called "A Character in Search of a Character." In this, Mr. Saroyan congratulated himself on being "my Bill," and notes that his heart's in the highlands, his stock over par. There is a slight absurdity about modern art and Vilma Kurer sings pleasantly the lament of a girl from Vienna who is getting pretty tired of Strauss. Miss

### 'REUNION IN NEW YORK'

A revue in two acts: conceived by Lothar Metzl and Werner Michel; music, mostly by Andre Slinger and Mr. Michel; additional songs by David Gregory and Bereneca Kazanoff; staged by Herbert Berghof and Ezra Stone; settings by Harry Horner; costumes by Lester Polakoff; dances by Lotte Goslar; presented at the Little Theater on February 21, 1940, by the American Viennese Group, Inc. In the cast are Leo Weith, Lisei Paul, Anthony Scott, Herman Walter, Annie Dresser, Charlotte Krauss, Bert Silver, Emory Gonder, Maria Temple, Peter Koch, Klaus Brill, Nelly Franck, Nelly Hyrt, Vilma Kurer, Paul Lindenberg, Fred Lorenz, Katherine Mattern, Walter Martin, Elisabeth Neumann, Maria Pichlar, Henry Peever, Lothar Rewalt, Edgar Vincent and Lotte Goslar.

Katherine Mattern illustrates different kinds of laughter with a gloomy countenance and explosive glee and in other exercises reveals a charming comic talent.

And as was true last June, the performers are almost always better than their material. They still have a tendency to form into choral groups and are unable to resist the dear temptation to embark on puppet scenes. But what they most evidently need is some new authors and, just possibly, a little less wistfulness. They have cause enough to feel wistful, heaven knows, and they are touching when they entertain memory's ghosts. But memory's ghosts have never much enlivened the revue stage, and being touching is not enough.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, February 22, 1940

## Reunion in New York Has Viennese Flavor

Revue Captures American Humor, But With Foreign Personality

LAST spring the Austrian exiles who cavorted at the Little Theater last evening announced curtly that they were From Vienna and received a warm and amiable welcome at the Music Box. But now that they have embraced Father Knickerbocker as their permanent host and the stranger's cloak of exile does not weigh so heavily upon them, they label this revue Reunion in New York. It is their token of appreciation to a metropolis that has happily taken them in and brought them together again.

When they were freshly migrant from Vienna these ingratiating and extremely talented refugees had not yet been acclimated to the racy ways and breezy pace of Broadway. Since most of their number had been together in the abandoned Kleinkunst buehne in Vienna, their first offering was stirring in the spirit of old times. And no one who attended their modest entertainment could help but be moved by their brave efforts to salvage all that enchantment which they had been compelled to leave behind.

But between then and now the American Viennese, as they would like themselves described, have had time to poke around into the domestic scene and the local vagaries of humor. And because they seem desperately eager to sever themselves from all their

tragic memories they have adopted the indigenous revue style in a great many respects. All of them speak English excellently now, though the foreign accent and inflection lingers. And valiantly as they try, they cannot scuttle the flavor of personality and manner that they bring from abroad.

So, consequently, their new revue is an uneven pot-pourri of radiant captivating material and of dull and uninspiring numbers. When they are recalling the richly romantic lore of old Vienna—even when they are spoofing some of it—these involuntary exiles are at their very best. They are polished and well-groomed performers in their own tongue and they can move the audience deeply by

recollecting such halycon moments in their native country.

But Broadway banter is not their idiom and when they are joshing such local institutions as the self-beloved William Saroyan or New York City's cigaret tax to the tune of Carmen, they are way off the key in which playgoers are sympathetically attuned to them. The Rialto's racier routines do not suit their innocent talents and whoever borrowed the low humors of the boudoir skit for their purposes, and persuaded them to imitate it, was much in error.

For the nummers in Reunion in New York are gay and charming people of another land who aren't quite ready to parrot the domestic laughter. They possess a great deal of laughter in their own right. As a matter of fact one of the highlights of the show is an hilariously clinical discourse on laughter, with brilliant demonstrations on the subject by Katherine Mattern. Although the satire of some of Lotte Goslar's dance impressions eluded me (as dance satires usually do), the audience seemed to enjoy them all tremendously, as evidenced by the applause.

And with such grace as the Viennese execute a folk legend entitled Shooting Gallery, Reunion in New York truly rises high above the ordinary along with one of the finesses which is rather heavily labeled Oratorium Salzburgensis, but which, when they get right down to it, is a lively spoof on the face of Salzburg after the Germans clattered over the cobblestones. There is not a host of players in the little show, but each one is a performer of unmistakable individuality, and among them you will find Fred Lorenz, drolly learning English to his dismay in six difficult lessons; the comely Vilma Kurer, who sings as well as she looks, and others whom you may not recognize From Vienna.

It is only when Reunion in New York descends to the pedestrian patter that it becomes conventional entertainment. When the reunion harks back to Vienna, it cannot leave you wholly uninterested.

GEORGE ROSS



# "Reunion in New York"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, February 22, 1940

## 'Reunion in New York' Is the Second Revue By the Kleinkunstbuehne From Vienna

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IN A world that seems to be disintegrating, the American Viennese Group provide considerable consolation. Formerly known as the Kleinkunstbuehne in Vienna, they are refugees who put on "From Vienna" last June with the generous assistance of a good many Broadway people. Now they are open for custom again in a second revue, entitled "Reunion in New York," which they acted at the Little last evening. As an example of the light touch in entertainment it is warming and delightful, for these singers, dancers and comedians know how to translate capricious ideas into unassuming gaiety.

Although the problem of resettlement is probably outside the realm of drama reviewing, it is impossible to ignore another aspect of the new revue. The American Viennese group are rapidly adapting themselves to the conditions of their new country. The English spoken by the performers has improved remarkably. It is good enough now to make jokes on the local accent. They have also become sufficiently acclimatized to play for American audiences with a genuine understanding of theatre spirit here. The numbers, which were inclined to be overlong last Sum-

mer, are brief and pithy. Attractively costumed by Lester Polakov and brightly set by Harry Horner, "Reunion in New York" feels more at home than its predecessor did, and a small theatre helps to preserve its sense of hospitality.

Excepting one keen-mettled satire on Saroyan, the material is more informal than brilliant. They are wisely preserving the comic "English in Six Easy Lessons," which Fred Lorenz plays with modest skill, and they have restaged the introductory letter written home. Most of the material is light

and unsubstantial—a grotesque solo dance or two, a satire on modern art and Picasso in particular, a burlesque of chorus girl manners, cartoons of love under Nazi dictatorship and national borders redefined by decree, a humorous report from hotel keepers in Salzburg and an enchanting pantomime of figures in a mechanical shooting gallery. Nearly everything seems improvised.

But the material is less important than the spirit of the performers, which is hospitable. They are excellent hosts. In a frail little sketch on the varieties of laughter, Walter Martin's gravity and Katherine Mattern's droll illustrations are completely winning. Paul Lindenberg's quiet antics as a bathtub baritone are equally captivating. In a lament for Poland, Bohemia and Austria, Vilma Kurer, Maria Pichler and Nelly Franck sing with moving sincerity. The shooting gallery pantomime is done with exquisite grace. Although American satire must come difficult to actors recently from abroad, Henry Peever and Vilma Kurer turn the Saroyan skit into the neatest thing in that vein this season.

The American style in revue acting is brief, fast and annihilating, and no one denies that it makes for excellent entertainment. But it is a good thing to be reminded that subtle manners also make for spontaneity. Put the Viennese group down as wine-garden entertainers with an instinct for friendliness. They are trying to evoke that feeling by turning their prologue into a wine-garden scene, and singing in the aisles as well as on stage while the audience is coming in. Their last number returns to the same mood of nostalgia. Some of "Reunion in New York" is funny, some of it is charming and some of it tenderly witty. It is encouraging to see how well those people are getting on in our city, and it is impossible to spend an evening in their company without wishing them all "good luck!"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, February 22, 1940

## Exiles

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THE refugees from Vienna who are putting on the intimate revue called "Reunion in New York" are a pleasant and courageous group, determined to carry on their theatrical careers amid their new surroundings. Not too hysterically bitter about their cruel treatment at home and not too lugubriously sentimental about Alt Wien, they are able to laugh, as well as sing and dance. In their new show they manage to be satirical from time to time about their enemies, the problems of the alien in a new world, certain picturesque American phenomena—such as Mr. Saroyan, for example—and even the matter of Viennese waltzes. Although they do not mind denouncing the works of Hitlerism upon occasion, they keep their seriousness pretty much under control, and they are almost always comfortingly good natured. In return for all of this and in the interest of hospitality, I wish I could be enthusiastic about their revue, but the best I can say for it is that it is something a little bit different.

The danger of all these informal shows, whether Viennese or American, is, of course, that their treatment of good ideas can sometimes be too informal for comfort. "Reunion in New York," for example, has a number of potentially admirable conceptions, but only upon occasion are they properly worked out. The problems of the stranger in a strange land, the matter of shifting European boundary lines, a pseudo-scientific study of laughter and a topical "Carmen" offer promising subjects, but, due to excessive length or a weak ending or general disability, few of them result happily enough. The most successful of the aforementioned numbers is the study in laughter, with the serious-minded lecturer employing a lady assistant in his demonstrations, but the gaiety of the episode is worn out before the ending comes, despite the ingenious work of Miss Kath-

erine Mattern. Chiefly if you are to enjoy "Reunion in New York," you must do so for its informality, its spirit and its courage, rather than for any great excellence in its numbers.

The performers, whose English is surprisingly good, strive earnestly and with a proper lack of ostentation, and a number of them possess pleasant talents. Miss Mattern, who has already been mentioned, is a resourceful if slightly emphatic comedienne; Miss Vilma Kurer reveals freshness, charm and a considerable knowledge of musical comedy performance, and Miss Maria Pichler is a likable and attractive ingenue. The men, too, perform agreeably, with Fred Lorenz proving helpful as a comedian and Harry Peever appearing as Mr. Saroyan at least as effectively as the sketch would permit. There is a young woman who does grotesque make-up and dances, and the first audience liked her greatly, but I am afraid that I am not among her admirers. Speaking of the audience, it can be said that it was friendly, as it should have been. For the Viennese refugees deserve commendation for their efforts, even if their show has its frailties.

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# "The Unconquered"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, February 14, 1940

## 'The Unconquered,' a Jumbled Melodrama, Opens at the Biltmore

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

RATHER turgid melodrama occupied most of last evening at the Biltmore Theater, where Ayn Rand's "The Unconquered" was presented by George Abbott.

It could be detected throughout, however, that the author was groping toward her theme through the dramaturgical fog and toward the end she found it. Then she spoke, not without eloquence of a sort, for the unique importance of the individual. This is a fine end for any play, but does not in this case entirely justify Miss Rand's means.

The intricate action of the melodrama is laid in Petrograd in the days of the "new economic policy" and the heroine is the suspected daughter of a factory owner. She is in revolt against a theory of life which crushes lives and she is also in love with a somewhat worthless survivor of the old regime. To obtain money for the medical treatment which will save his life, she becomes the cheating mistress of a handsome young man of the G.P.U. and he, rather disconcertingly for everybody—possibly including Miss Rand—turns out to be the drama's hero. Even before he is converted to a feeling for the individual, he is an idealist and a man of principle and possibly it is this fact which makes the girl's individual triumph over him seem a peculiarly shoddy one.

Mixed in with this is much hurly-burly of plot. The girl's lover becomes involved in a

speculator's racket, engineered by a typical Russian who calls everybody "pal," and the young communist discovers that there is venality in the party. The girl leaves in a white fur coat to try to cross the border so that she may reach a world where she may follow her bent, which is, oddly enough, to build bridges of aluminum. The young communist kills himself. The young aristocrat deserts the girl and everything is at two and threes, marked down from sixes and sevens.

Mr. Abbott is reported to have tried his writing hand on "The Unconquered" after the interruption of its tour in Baltimore. If he did he has had less than his usual luck at clarification. The play is confused and directionless and, although a lot appears to go

### 'THE UNCONQUERED'

A play in three acts by Ayn Rand, based on the author's novel, "We, The Living"; directed by George Abbott; settings by Boris Aronson; produced by Mr. Abbott at the Biltmore Theatre on February 13, 1940. The cast:

|                      |                                  |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| A Soldier            | John Farriash                    |
| Leo Kovalensky       | John Emery                       |
| Upravdom             | Cliff Dunstan                    |
| Kira Argounova       | Helen Craig                      |
| A Student            | Paul Ballantyne                  |
| Comrade Sonia        | Georgiana Brand                  |
| Favel Syerov         | Arthur Pierson                   |
| Older Examiner       | Ascher Smith                     |
| Andrei Taganov       | Dean Jagger                      |
| Malashkin            | Edwin Phillips                   |
| Comrade Bitluk       | Ellen Hall                       |
| Girl Clerk           | Virginia Dumlin                  |
| Boy Clerk            | William Bliss                    |
| Comrade Voronov      | Horace Cooper                    |
| Stephan Timoshenko   | George Cotton                    |
| Karp Morozov         | Howard Freeman                   |
| Antonina Pavlovna    | Lea Penman                       |
| G.P.U. Chief         | Marshall Bradford                |
| Assist. G.P.U. Chief | Frank O'Connor                   |
| Party Club Attendant | George Smith                     |
| Neighbor             | Ludmilla Toretzka                |
|                      | Soldiers, Citizens, Judges, etc. |

on, singularly static. Of all the characters only that of the G.P.U. operative takes on clarity and the theme, which might have been a guiding light through the fog, emerges only at the end and then uncertainly, almost afraid the author's appeal for the individual spirit is submerged in an uninteresting play.

Dean Jagger acts the one substantial role with solid authority and considerable imagination and Helen Craig is intense and appealing in the muddled part of the girl. The rest, including the usually reliable John Emery, act in a fine jumble of styles and are, for the most part, as striking un-Russian as one could well imagine.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, February 14, 1940

## "The Unconquered," a Drama About Russia, at the Biltmore

By WIZELLA WALDORF

GEORGE ABBOTT does some surprising things. Nobody on Broadway can touch him when it comes to putting on screaming farces. His musical comedies are usually hits. But now and then he comes out with something like "The Unconquered," which opened at the Biltmore last night, and a remarkably dull, not to say embarrassing, evening is the result.

Casting around for some clue to Mr. Abbott's probable reason for taking the trouble to produce Ayn Rand's melodramatic treatise on what's wrong with Soviet Russia and why—in three acts and ten scenes—we can only hit on an obvious one.

Soviet Russia isn't very popular in this country right now and anything calculated to make it look silly is bound to attract a certain amount of patronage.

Ayn Rand, the author of the piece, is said to have visited Russia—even escaped from it, or something of the sort, some ten years ago—but she never succeeds in making "The Unconquered" seem anything but a twentieth-thirt show. Much of it sounds like a

pulp magazine gangster thriller about Chicago racketeers, only the locale is shifted to Petrograd by the simple expedient of giving Arthur Pierson a new haircut, dressing the plainer women of the cast in old middie blouses, and causing the actors to address each other as "Comrade."

The usual jokes about the lateness of Russian trains (When is the train from the Crimea due? It's expected any day now) are

tossed in for laughs and when Kira Argounova asks for three months pay in advance so that she can send her ailing lover, Leo Kovalensky, to a sanitarium for tuberculosis, her superior in the office inquires, "Where do you think you are, in a capitalist country?"

### G. P. U. Man Reforms

Miss Rand is at some pains to prove that the Communist ideal won't work because Man is an individual, not a machine, and she even goes so far as to have the noblest Communist of them all, none other than Andrei Taganov of the G.P.U., see the light in Scene Nine. (Scene Ten, needless to add, features Andrei's funeral offstage.)

Some day this reviewer would like to see a sensible play about Soviet Russia take up the same theme and make it convincing at least part of the time. "The Unconquered" is the sort of thing that should be played, if at all, with the audience at tables, drinking vodka.

In cases of this kind we always feel very sorry for the actors, most of whom were well-known last night and deserved something better. Helen Craig played earnestly as Kira Argounova, who wanted to learn how to build sky-rappers, but was prevented by the Technological Institute, and so turned to the even more precarious business of being mistress to an aristocrat and a member of the G.P.U. at the same time. Dean Jagger was even more earnest as the member of the G.P.U. who finally saw the light, and John Emery wore evening clothes and a pained expression as the gentleman who had the misfortune to be the Admiral's son.

If Miss Rand isn't careful, she's going to be the Boucault of 1940.

# "The Unconquered"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, February 14, 1940

## Red Terror

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

SINCE almost every one is making faces at the Bolsheviks these days, there probably is no reason why George Abbott shouldn't get in on the sport, too. Nevertheless, if the results achieved by Mr. Abbott are any indication, it would appear that the theater is going to have as much trouble scolding the Soviet Union as it used to have spanking the Nazis. The cinema has done much better with its "Ninotchka." Mr. Abbott's "The Unconquered," however, is, despite an attempt in one or two scenes, not concerned with satire. It is in deadly earnest, which is frequently a splendid thing in propagandist plays, though not unless combined with a bit of dramatic talent. In the current offering, the work of the angry Miss Ayn Rand, there is much spluttering indignation, but the melodrama is so ancient and fraudulent in its manipulations and so confused when it attempts to grow philosophical that it can only be set down as one of the season's mishaps.

There are times during the course of "The Unconquered" when the more suspicious members of the audience are almost lured into the belief that the play is really a Bolshevik propaganda. Not only does Miss Rand's melodrama make a GPU man its most attractive character, but its loudest eloquence seems devoted to the contention that what the Russians needed were more and better purges. The idealistic agent of

the secret police is surrounded by shrewd, Tosca-like heroines, decadent aristocrats, corrupt politicians and fat speculators, and the most violent charge the play brings against the Communist regime is that the GPU refuses to shoot more of them. In fact, in the end the only casualty is the aforesaid idealistic police agent, who is so unhappy about his betrayal at the hands of the heroine and the refusal of his superiors to do a bit more purging that he does away with himself sacrificially.

Perhaps one mistake of the play is its selection of the hopeful earlier days of the Soviet Union, rather than the disillusioning period of recent years, for its attack. The

real fault, however, is nothing more or less than the fact that "The Unconquered" is very bad, pretentious melodrama. Its attempts to satirize the dogmatism and efficiency of the Communist bureaucrats—which, as "Ninotchka" proved, are marvelous targets for satire—are heavy handed and ineffectual; the characterizations are two-dimensional, the drama stale and familiar, and the flights into philosophy feeble. "The Unconquered" requires ten scenes to tell its story, and you won't require many of them to know that the heroine is going to give herself to the idealistic Bolshevik to save her aristocratic lover, that the Bolshevik will grow romantic and sacrificial and that eventually he will give up his own life for love and romance. Such a noble fellow hardly serves to point an anti-Bolshevik moral, but I can assure you that the play is pretty mad at the Communists.

If "The Unconquered" were really a stirring melodrama, the indistinctness of its characterizations would not be terribly important. Since, however, its physical action is both feeble and stenciled, at least the people of the story should have meant something. What happens, though, is that they are seldom more than puppets, and not very credible puppets at that. The only character approaching vividness is the Bolshevik, and the natural result is that Dean Jagger has more luck with the role than have any of his fellow players. Miss Helen Craig as the author's idea of a heroine, and John Emery as the embittered aristocrat have unbelievable parts and it is to their credit that they manage them as well as they do. The lesser roles are not cast with the customary Abbott insight. "The Unconquered" is hardly the sort of play that is likely to cause Stalin to cringe in a corner of the Kremlin.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, February 14, 1940

## "The Unconquered"

MR. GEORGE ABBOTT, the sage of Pottawatomie College, last evening prodded a finger into the question of personal liberty and/or love on the steppes of the U.S.S.R. He did it by producing at the Baltimore Theatre Ayn Rand's play called "The Unconquered," which a bit back was tried out in Baltimore—the interim presumably having been devoted to reflection as well as cast changes. As it went along on Forty-seventh Street, the drama seemed to be, as they say, confusing, not going too thoroughly into the matter of the individual man in Russia, 1924—where there would be a play—and not adding to the theatre's already expert knowledge of the state of romance.

Miss Rand gives you an aristocrat, sardonic and bitter, a girl from tsarist days who is willing to accept the U.S.S.R. if she can learn in the engineering school how to build "white, aluminum bridges," and a gentleman of the G. P. U. The aristocrat must retire to the South to recover from an illness, and in order to finance that trip the girl makes a personal sale to the officer of the G. P. U. In the process of this bit of dalliance he falls in love with her, allowing Miss Rand to have a triangle that finally bursts apart with the suicide of one member, the attempt of another to escape from Russia with an ermine coat—the same use of white with the snow now being used by others against the U.S.S.R.—and the departure of the third into gigoлизм.

Of the people in it, John Emery is the aristocrat, Helen Craig the would-be builder of bridges and Dean Jagger the beset man of the G. P. U.—the latter having most of the less thoughtless sayings of the piece and turning in a sincere and likable performance. There also are Arthur Pierson, as a sort of Soviet racketeer; Howard Freeman, as a sort of Palsifian semi-racketeer, and sundry others.

There also are seven settings by Boris Aronson, good settings. Mr. Abbott directed, of course, trying to pull together the sentimental melodrama that was almost old Hoboken and the discussion of the rights of man, of which there was not nearly enough.

L. N.

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# "The Unconquered"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, February 14, 1940

## "The Unconquered", Melodrama Of Dishonor Among the Soviets

"The Unconquered," drama by Ayn Rand. Produced by George Abbott at the Biltmore Theatre, New York, Feb. 13, 1940.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

BACK in the Winter of 1924 things were pretty tough in the Soviet republic, if you remember. As a matter of fact they were pretty tough whether you remember or not. Forces dominated by Stalin had taken over with more thoroughness than judgment, and the Gay Pay Oo (or secret police) was doing a good deal of cheating for what was said to be the good of the party.

Take, as Ayn Rand has in "The Unconquered," produced at the Biltmore Theatre last night, take the case of Leo Kovalensky. Leo was an aristocrat. His father had been liquidated and he had been tossed into jail for four months.

Out of jail Leo was naturally pretty bitter. He wasn't exactly seeking revenge, but he didn't care much what happened. Especially what happened to the Communist party. And he was suffering from an incipient consumption which he had contracted in jail.

### Noble Friend

Now there also was Kira Argounova, his loyal sweetheart. Kira was prepared to make any sacrifice to save Leo. When it seemed likely that he was to be further mistreated by the police, Kira nobly gave herself to Andrei Taganov, the investigating agent, in return for sufficient money and influence to get Leo into the warmer climate of the Crimea to check his consumption.

That was the beginning. Drama followed after, when Leo came back, a well man, but still bitter. And tragedy closed upon the heels of drama when Leo found out that Kira had been living as Andrei's mistress while he was away.

"The Unconquered," which Miss Rand has extracted from her novel, "We the Living," is a perfectly workmanlike melodrama, well cast and well acted by the company George Abbott has assembled.

If it seems a bit futile and rather palpably huddled to a theatre pattern, I suspect it is because it is difficult for us to get very close to the tragedy that is Russia's in the struggle of its proletariat for power and the abuses resulting therefrom.

The interest is held but the imagination is not fired nor the emotions noticeably stirred. There is a certain amount of forced nobility involved that serves to minimize the appeal of the story. And, as I say, also a good deal of obvious theatre.

### Worthy Actors

Dean Jagger is the would-be noble G. P. U. agent and manages to keep his man alive and human and not as improbable and hard as the secret police of the drama usually are. His final defense of the principals of a free-man is dramatic and his feeling for the heroine nicely restrained in its passion.

On the other hand John Emery, playing the inciter of romance in the person of the cheated aristocrat for whom the heroine is willing to sacrifice all, is, as stage aristocrats usually are, rather inclined to take things for granted. The fault is Miss Rand's rather than Emery's, I'd say. Or perhaps Director Abbott's.

Helen Craig, who was being emotional with her husband, John Beal, earlier in the season in a little something called "Soliloquy," plays the heroine with a good deal of earnestness and such sacrifice of cosmetics as to make her appear very real and quite Russian.

There are good performances, too, by Arthur Pierson and Horace Cooper, as cheating Soviet officials; by Lea Penman as a feminine opportunist; by Georgiana Brant as a luckless bride, and Ellen Hall as a party clod.

The setting is by Boris Aaronson and fittingly expresses the Russian depression:

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, February 14, 1940

## The Unconquered, a Play of the Russia of 1925

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

IF AYN RAND'S new play, *The Unconquered*, is intended as anti-Bolshevik propaganda, it is neither impressive enough in its doctrine nor brilliant enough in its satire to arouse anything beyond the mildest interest in the subject. If it is intended only as melodrama, it falls even more signally to accomplish its purpose.

The contrast between the imaginary happenings of this play, which are supposed to take place in 1925, and the monstrous historical disillusionment of 1939 is too great. The Soviet government itself has written the most powerful anti-Soviet drama, exactly as the Nazi government has written the strongest anti-Nazi drama, and it seems a waste of time even for the most accomplished of playwrights to attempt to match history with their own imaginations.

There are occasional touches of the satirical quality in *The Unconquered*. I strongly suspect that some of them were provided by George Abbott, who is sponsoring the play. But these effective interludes are instantly brushed aside in favor of the heavy-handed melodrama, and their effects are weakened or lost.

The inefficiency of Russia's industrial and economic system in 1925 is scarcely news. The breakdown of transportation, the lackadaisical operation of railroads, the peculiar management of educational institutions, the topsy-turvy philosophy elevating the ignorant and debasing the brainy—all these are not capable of astonishing us. Nor are the greed, knavery, speculation, thievery and other

criminalities among the petty officials, upon which the author strongly plays, any startling disclosure. All these manifestations of human weakness become trifling and insignificant in the light of the world-shaking events beginning with Stalin's purges and ending with the attempted rape of Finland.

We are given a not-too-clear picture, however, of a group of selfish Soviet leaders engaged in feathering their own nests at the expense of the dumb proletariat. Fitted somewhat mechanically into the picture is a triangle consisting of an OGPU agent who is strangely idealistic for one of his calling, an aristocrat who is peculiarly weak and ignoble, and a young woman who gives herself to the OGPU man in order to save the other fellow from the firing squad. In the final act, the scales fall from the eyes of the OGPU agent, he sees the falsity of his Soviet colleagues and shoots himself.

...

A good cast struggles as well as it could against the ponderous odds of long speeches, oratory and wordy messages to the world. Dean Jagger's work as the OGPU agent, and Helen Craig's intense acting in the role of the girl, afforded the most memorable moments of the evening. John Emery has another distasteful part. He is the sullen, weak-willed and selfish aristocrat, and I wish some one would give him (and he would accept) a role that would give him an opportunity to be ingratiating for a change. I can't believe he actually enjoys acting this one.

*The Unconquered* is not so much anti-Bolshevik as anti-climax.

# "Two for the Show"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, February 9, 1940

## 'Two for the Show' Lively Revue Designed for the Carriage Trade

"Two for the Show," musical revue, sketches and lyrics by Nancy Hamilton, music by Morgan Lewis. Produced by Gertrude Macy and Stanley Gilkey at the Booth Theatre, New York, Feb. 8, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

IT ISN'T so much the show as it is the spirit and good taste of it that present a first bid for attention in evaluating the boxoffice worth of "Two for the Show," opening at the Booth last night.

This is the second in the series that Gertrude Macy and Stanley Gilkey started last season with "One for the Money." It is, in its general make-up much like the first number. Better in spots, I thought, especially the dancing spots.

Not quite so satisfying in other spots, which would include those from which the author of sketches and lyrics, the gifted Nancy Hamilton herself, is missing.

Miss Hamilton, however, has a grand substitute in Eve Arden, with Brenda Forbes showing a considerable and pleasing development in her particular brand of feminine grotesqueries.

And that talented young English monologist, Richard Haydn, the unforgettable Mr. Carp of the last Noel Coward-Beatrice Lillie revue, "Set to Music," adds a professional touch that lifts the evening's average.

### Mr. Carp Obliges

Mr. Haydn's helpful hints this season include a little cockney talk on "Culinary cun-

ning in the kitchen," with recipes. But he doubts in plain face and fancy bits also, to his own credit and the show's advantage.

There is a riotous young person named Betty Hutton, who has sung with the Vincent Lopez orchestra at the Casa Manana and in one or two night clubs, who was the darling of last night's audience.

Miss Hutton, Detroit born 19 years ago and as dynamic as a Harvest Moon jitterbug, dances wildly, sings after a fashion, squints her eyes in a funny little grin, puffs out her cheeks and makes a lot of friends whenever she appears. She has a "Little Miss Muffet"

number that brings things to a halt for a moment.

It will pay her directors, and Miss Hutton, not to overdo her appearances. The physical strain is considerable and an over-stimulated vanity too, is bad for talented youngsters.

John Murray Anderson did the directing and Raoul Pene du Bois set the stage and designed the costumes. This makes for a couple of good looking and tasteful production numbers, "House With a Little Red Barn," and "How High the Moon," suggesting a black out in London, are two of them.

### More Dancing

"At Last It's Love" is attractive and "Where Do You Get Your Greens?" is a period bit with more character and charm than most similar interludes.

Tommy Wonder comes honestly by his nom du danse, a native whirling dervish with grace added. Eunice Healey adds exceedingly clever acrobatic and ballet incidents. Nadine Gae and William Archibald are excellent in support.

Miss Forbes' best number is that of a Christmas tree doll, suspended to the top of a tree itself, and Miss Arden is vastly amusing as a talkative victim in a dentist's chair. She scores again in a study of the electric Gertrude Lawrence "resting" between scenes.

Keenan Wynn figures pleasantly in most of the sketches, Frances Comstock, Albert Drake, Kathryn Kimber and Robert Smart do most of the singing.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, February 9, 1940

## 'Two for the Show' Has All It Needs for Success

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

BUILT on the same general pattern as "One for the Money," the new smart revue by Nancy Hamilton and Morgan Lewis which they logically call "Two for the Show" has many of the same elements that contributed to the charm of the first production. It has the brilliant settings and costuming of Raoul Pene du Bois, the clever dancing of half a dozen vivid youngsters, and some of Miss Hamilton's brisk humor.

It also boasts the added comedy of Richard Haydn (Mr. Carp, the lecturer on fish—remember?) and the presence of Keenan Wynn, who is beginning to tread the comic path made smooth by his daddy.

With all these assets, it would seem that "Two for the Show" possessed everything necessary for success. In all candor, however, it must be admitted that it lacks the spontaneity and dash of its predecessor, and that some of its sketches wear very thin. Perhaps we miss the influence on the stage of Miss Hamilton herself, who was one of the mainstays of last year's production.

If, for example, we had never seen Mr. Haydn do his act as the Cockney lecturer, his present sketch, in which Mr. Carp discourses gravely on the art of cookery, would appear a masterpiece of witty characterization. The new lecture is indeed funny, but familiarity with the lecturer has somehow dulled the effect.

So it is with another skit, a scene laid in a dentist's office, in which the lady patient (the clever Eve Arden) talks Dentist Wynn out of his eye teeth. The pattern of it is in the loquacious vein of Miss Hamilton's sketch of last year in which she explained the opera to a long-suffering friend, and it necessarily suffers by comparison.

There is, however, one department against which no criticism can be leveled, and that is the dancing. There is no chorus, as you probably knew, but each member of the cast is a specialist. Once more we see, for example, the nimble Nadine Gae and the agile Tommy Wonder, Eunice Healy, Willard Gary and William Archibald. The costermonger dance by Miss Healy and Mr. Wonder. Miss Gae's specialty, Soft Shoe, and Mr. Gary's

tap dancing were in particular something to cheer.

Brenda Forbes is once more in the cast with her own well-known brand of humor. Although she has rather less material to work with, Miss Arden, who is always vivid, throws herself into the broad comedy with lovely abandon, and Alfred Drake (whose imitation of Orson Welles was a high spot last year) lends his pleasant personality to the show.

Of the newcomers, there is a shining light in young Betty Hutton, who is said to have been discovered by Vincent Lopez three years ago in the wilds of Michigan, and who practically stopped the show last night in a rousing wailing number called Little Miss Muffet, wherein Mr. Wynn enacted the part of the spider. Miss Hutton is a zippy young thing, who wrinkles her nose delightfully and mows you down with her energy. She is perhaps the real discovery of the evening.

Kathryn Kimber and Robert Smart sing nicely and Frances Comstock adds her personality to many of the musical numbers. Mr. Wynn's music is tuneful, and while there is nothing so good in the production as Teeter-totter Tessie, the score in general is an improvement.

It is perhaps unfair to compare Mr. duBois' settings with those of his masterpiece, One for the Money, for nothing has been seen here before or since that could match the striking blacks and whites he turned out for that production. This year's are, however, far above those of the average revue and there is plenty to fill the eye at all times.

All in all, "Two for the Show" provides a pleasant evening, and if I have seemed to indicate disappointment in it, perhaps it is because I expected too much. There is enough in it to make one hope that Miss Hamilton will not get tired of trying—and that Gertrude Macy and Stanley Gilkey will not get tired of producing.

# "Two for the Show"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, February 9, 1940

## 'Two for the Show' Comes as the Successor to Last Year's 'One for the Money'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

FEELING the need of a little revue at this dismal time of year, the people who put on "One for the Money" last season offer "Two for the Show" as its successor. It opened at the Booth last evening. Handsomely produced by the effulgent John Murray Anderson and smartly staged by Joshua Logan, it makes a very pleasant evening out of attractive young actors and mixed materials. Although a good many of Nancy Hamilton's sketches are still more clever than entertaining, she has more of a professional accent to them than she had last season, and Morgan Lewis's score is a bright one for miniature revue-making. "Two for the Show" is little in size and good-humored in spirit and breezily acted.

Fortunately, Mr. Carp, the egregious monologist who set "Set to Music" on its ear last season, has dropped in with a hilarious talk on cooking. Under that woefully dull make-up, he is Richard Haydn in person—a wonderful travesty on uninspired respectability. If cooking is not quite such a nit-wit topic as the extraordinary stuff that convulsed audiences last year, Mr. Carp's limp mannerisms and his gasping speech are still very funny parlor entertainment and the best item in this bundle of entertainment.

There is another new face in the company. It is fresh and antic and it belongs to Betty Hutton who dances like a mad sprite and sings breathlessly as though she enjoyed it. With Keenan Wynn, who is developing into a first-rate revue man, she sings and dances a wild tune about "Little Miss Muffett," and with Robert Smith she swings "A House With a Little Red Barn" so that almost any one begins to notice it. Say a little something also for Eve Arden, the rangy blonde who worked so valiantly in "Too Warm for May" last November. Mr. Wynn and she offer an amusing sketch in a dentist's operating room.

### 'TWO FOR THE SHOW'

A revue in two acts; sketches and lyrics by Nancy Hamilton; music by Morgan Lewis; production devised, staged and lighted by John Murray Anderson; scenery and costumes by Raoul Pène Du Bois; dances directed by Robert Alton; sketches directed by Joshua Logan; presented at the Booth Theater on February 8, 1940, by Gertrude Macy and Stanley Gilkey. In the cast are Eve Arden, Richard Haydn, Brenda Forbes, Betty Hutton, Eunice Healey, Nadine Gae, Keenan Wynn, Robert Smith, Alfred Drake, Tommy Wonder, Richard Smart, Frances Comstock, Kathryn Kimber, William Archibald, Willard Gray, Austine McDonnell and others.

somehow interpolating a movie plot into the gruesome business of repairing teeth. And Brenda Forbes, who made comic faces in "One for the Money," is on hand again to impersonate a sulky Infanta in "Spanish Spain" and to dangle with a disgruntled lyric from a disillusioned Christmas tree.

Apart from those numbers, Alfred Drake is back to do most of the good singing—ruefully in "How High the Moon" and jauntily in "The All-Girl Band" which winds up the first act with a flourish. Some of the material, like the opening number, builds up roughly to a big let-down, for Miss Hamilton's ideas can be minute as well as miniature, and Mr. Haydn's notion of "The Age of Innocence" is no jewel. But the dancing, which Robert Alton has directed, is neat and light. Raoul Pène Du Bois's costumes and settings are splendid. And every member of the cast is cheerful company. Probably "good taste" is no recommendation among the middens of Broadway. But it should not discourage well-bred theatregoers from sampling an intimate revue that retains some of the freshness of amateur skylarking.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, February 9, 1940

## New Revue

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THOSE who were enthusiastic about the fairly intimate revue called "One for the Money" last season should find equal happiness in its successor, "Two for the Show." It is pretty much the same sort of entertainment, fast, informal, intermittently merry and given to the hopeful manners of the promising amateur. The outstanding difference is that its chief comedienne is Miss Eve Arden, rather than Miss Nancy Hamilton, and the change, I must say, is all right with me. This reviewer must be included among the recalcitrants who find the studiously semi-amateur spirit of the proceedings less of a virtue than its sponsors aim for, but it must be said for "Two for the Show" that the players are attractive, the music pleasant, the settings anxious and occasionally talented, the comedy sometimes bright and the whole revue of that exasperating sort that insists on waiting for the second act really to swing into action. I must repeat that, if you liked "One for the Money," this is the show for you.

Although Miss Hamilton has given way to Miss Arden in the cast, she still is responsible for the sketches and lyrics, and my feeling is

that they suffer from characteristic defects. That is, they are replete with interesting ideas that rarely seem to work out as happily as they should. I suspect, too, that the comedy of the show has a way of being rather specialized fare, intended exclusively for the consumption of conscientious filmgoers. There is, for example, a sketch that makes what struck me as rather ill-natured fun of Miss Marlene Dietrich and her work in "Destiny Rides Again." That, however, is something we should all know about, and it

probably isn't going too far afield for satire. But when another number insists on your detailed knowledge of the activities of Miss Jeanette MacDonald, I fear that things are being carried just a little too far. There is a radio sketch and a sketch about a spiritualist that are considerably better, and when Richard Haydn, of fish-imitation fame, does another of his monologues, this time on the subject of cooking, you have the new revue at its best.

On the other hand, Mr. Haydn has a number about a British Boy Scout that isn't at all funny. He is, nevertheless, one of the props of the show, and so are Miss Brenda Forbes, who has a real satirical gift; the handsome Miss Arden, who is an excellent comedienne when given half a chance, and, to a lesser extent, Miss Eunice Healey and Miss Austine McDonnell. I liked the noisy and excitable Miss Betty Hutton in a lively number called "Little Miss Muffett" but, on the whole, I am inclined to regard Miss Hutton as a little-goes-a-long-way girl. Keenan Wynn is one of the more helpful of the men, but I must add that, in the main, the masculine side of the cast is not the show's strong point. Morgan Lewis's music is pleasant, if hardly distinguished, with "How High the Moon" seeming among the better pieces on a first hearing. Miss Arden, by the way, is decidedly at her best in an amiable satirizing Calypso number. Anyway, "Two for the Show" is a natural successor to "One for the Money."



# "Two for the Show"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, February 9, 1940

## "Two for the Show" Revue at the Booth Theatre

By WILLELLA WALDORF

GERTRUDE MACY and Stanley Gilkey, who suddenly went into the business of producing intimate revues last season with "One for the Money," put on a sequel at the Booth Theatre last night under the title, "Two for the Show," employing the same author, composer, director, designer and three or four of the same players. The spirit is still fresh and charming, but they have set about eliminating as far as possible a certain faintly amateurish, afternoon-at-a-woman's-club quality in last season's show that kept it from being quite the top-notch Broadway entertainment it was obviously intended to be. Result: "Two for the Show" is a considerable improvement over "One for the Money," is, in fact, so generally pleasant, often downright hilarious, that we hope Miss Macy and Mr. Gilkey are thinking of making it an annual Broadway affair.

Nancy Hamilton, who is not actually on the stage this season, is again author of the sketches and lyrics. Several of her skits are as funny as anything we've encountered this season, and are done to a turn by Eve Arden, late of "Very Warm for May"; Richard Haydn, who appeared with Bee Lillie in "Set to Music"; and Brenda Forbes, who used to support Katharine Cornell, but suddenly leaped over the traces and turned up in "One for the Money" last year.

Miss Arden, who has her moments as a talkative horse-woman at the dentist's, is

notably successful in a number picturing the woes of Marlene Dietrich in "Destry Rides Again," and mounts to a fine climax with a devastating impression of Gertrude Lawrence in "To a Skylark."

Mr. Haydn turns up as Mr. Carp again, giving a new lecture on Cookery this time, subtitled Culinary Cunning in the Kitchen or How to Titillate the Jaded Palate. His recipe for rice pudding with talcum powder (giving a fine nutty flavor) was enough to send first-nighters romping home to the kitchenette. Mr. Haydn also officiates as a gentleman in the stocks making love to Mistress Nell; plays a Cockney Yogi, and waxes very merry as a British boy scout with a soprano voice.

As for Miss Forbes, she is an endless sur-

prise. Nothing stops her. One minute she's a disgruntled Christmas tree ornament, sick of tinsel. Next she's an Infanta of Spain right out of Velasquez, growing pretty sick of the singing of her flunkys. And she developed hitherto unexpected talents as a drum beater in the All-Girl Band number that is a particularly fetching first-act finale.

### Ed Wynn's Son

Keenan Wynn, who is Ed Wynn's son and beginning to show it, helps out neatly all along the line, and we cheered to recognize Alfred Drake and Frances Comstock among the survivors from last year.

The dancing, as usual, is smart and clever, and is generally much better staged than of yore. Credit here to Robert Alton, no doubt, just as Joshua Logan must take a bow for the smooth-running skits.

Tommy Wonder and Betty Hutton are delightful dancers. Mr. Wonder living up to his name, Miss Hutton living down her press agent's insistence that she be called "America's Number One Jitterbug." Miss Hutton is full of pep and personality, she's young and obviously enjoying herself. You can't help enjoying her. Many good words are due the stepping of Eunice Healey, Nadine Gae, Willard Gary and William Archibald, experts in their line.

John Murray Anderson has pulled it all together and attended to the lighting effects with a sure hand, and the scenery and costumes by Raoul Pene du Bois, as usual with this designer, are in perfect taste and lend much to the charm of the production. Morgan Lewis' music is serviceable without being particularly world-shattering, but there are several tunes that will probably be blaring at you from the neighbor's radio well into the summer.

Altogether "Two for the Show" seems to be a definitely smart and amusing addition to the Broadway amusement list. We wouldn't mind in the least sitting right through it again, with special attention to the Gertrude Lawrence sketch.

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, February 9, 1940

## 'Two for the Show,' an Intimate Revue, Opens at Booth Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

A GOOD many of those charming people who were in "One for the Money" returned last evening to the Booth Theater in "Two for the Show," and brought some friends of theirs who are equally engaging. The show they also brought is a spick and span little thing, not so self-consciously smart as their previous escapade and, particularly toward the end, rather funnier. Miss Nancy Hamilton's sketches are still rather wan, but the people make up for them, or pretty nearly.

Eve Arden is one of the people this year, and that miraculous Richard Haydn, the fish man imported last season by Noel Coward. A blond hoyden, full of jitters and enthusiasm and named Betty Hutton, is a major delight, and Brenda Forbes is as droll and likable as ever. These and all the rest are suavely unassertive and light handed, and not even the longest sketch can dim their merry spirits. Their merriment is very well dressed, you understand, and well mannered, but it is never without freshness.

There is a spell toward the start when it seems that all these charms are to be outnumbered by Miss Hamilton's words. She begins with a skit on George S. Kaufman, which has its point too well hidden for a while and then too obvious. She continues by dragging Miss Forbes, Frances Comstock and some others through a burlesque, "Information Please," which gets nobody anywhere and, only a few minutes later, Mr. Haydn commits his only error of the evening as the author of a protracted piece called "The Age of Innocence," which has gently stilled the mind long before it reaches its point. And then, after an interlude, Miss Hamilton embarks on a laborious sketch called "Destry Has Ridden Again," leading Miss Arden

along by the hand, and pretty firmly.

These things and one or two others bear down heavily. But Miss Hutton comes out now and then in one of her gay explosions, and Nadine Gae and Eunice Healey, along with their men folk, are permitted to dance with graceful ease. And then Mr. Haydn appears in proper person, and gives a little talk on cookery, and after that things move brightly. The last act reveals Miss Arden in a rare burlesque of an actress named Miss Torrence—who could that be, do you suppose?—and has a lot more of Miss Hutton and some more of Mr. Haydn and the sketches improve almost out of recognition.

Raoul Pene Du Bois and John Murray Anderson have put their talents together to brighten the revue's appearance and Morgan Lewis has composed pleasant tunes for it. An intimate revue should, I think, be wittier than this is and rather more mentally insouciant. But "Two for the Show" is nice, if not precocious.

### These Are But a Few of the Many Subscribers to Critics' Theatre Reviews

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Indianapolis Civic Theatre  
Richmond Little Theatre  
Pasadena Playhouse

# "The Taming of the Shrew"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, February 6, 1940

## The Lunts Return in Shakespeare's "Shrew" For a Brief Engagement at the Alvin

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

ALFRED LUNT and Lynn Fontanne pranced back to town last evening in "The Taming of the Shrew," which reopened at the Alvin Theater and will stay on view there only for a week. The Finnish Relief Fund and the theatergoers of New York are the beneficiaries, the fund getting the cash and the theatergoers the fun. The fun is as abundant as the cash ought to be.

It hardly seems so long, but it was more than four years ago that the Lunts began to disport themselves in Shakespeare's comedy—or in so much of Shakespeare's comedy as they thought would be funny to see and fun to do. Then it seemed to a few of the grouchy that the sport was a shade laborious; that not even the Lunts would be able to make "The Taming of the Shrew" much more than a faintly literary tour de force. This gloomy view may now be diagnosed as premature.

Now it is quick, ribald and delightfully casual, clowning done for the sheer delight of the jest. The Lunts, by long wearing, have reshaped the comedy to fit their spirits. The fabric of the play has grown soft and flexible through use. Gaining confidence, the inseparable stars have discarded more and more of Shakespeare's fret-work plot, so that now there is little more than its outline to bother them. And to take the place of all that intricate masquerade of courtship, so full of devices which only an author could have, they have invented bright new antics of their own. In these anybody can delight.

Mr. Lunt is particularly at ease as Petruchio. He has a cavalier way with the duller passages, tossing them amiably aside. He and his fellows step out of character to greet late comers with affable surprise and to repeat scenes for their benefit. He and Miss Fontanne romp distractingly through their shared scenes and seem to have found new zest from the familiarity of their roles. Richard Whorf's broad clowning threatens to roll him out of the stage box, and the audience out of the seats. Sydney Greenstreet, substantial as ever, chuckles through the usually thankless role of Baptista, and the whole production is colorful and acrobatic.

So all who like may now do both Finland and themselves a good turn. The opportunity is presented for only a week, however, and those who later will miss the Lunts, a particularly unfortunate fate.

### "THE TAMING OF THE SHREW"

Shakespeare's comedy, arranged in two acts; directed by Harry Wagstaff Gribble; scheme of production devised by Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne; production and costumes by Caggett Wilson; setting by Carolyn Hancock; revived at the Alvin Theater by the Theater Guild, in association with John C. Wilson, on February 6, 1940. The cast:

|                       |                    |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Christopher Sly       | Richard Whorf      |
| A Lord                | Philip Bourneuf    |
| First Huntsman        | Gilmore Bush       |
| Second Huntsman       | Cameron Mitchell   |
| Third Huntsman        | Brooks West        |
| Bartholomew           | Donald Buka        |
| Lucentio              | Alan Hewitt        |
| Tranio                | Norman Stuart      |
| Two Townswomen        | Sharon Curran      |
| Pantaloon             | Charles Bowden     |
| Baptista              | Sydney Greenstreet |
| Gremio                | Francis Compton    |
| Hortensio             | Byron McGrath      |
| Bianca                | Fay Baker          |
| Katherine             | Lynn Fontanne      |
| Blondello             | Alex Courtney      |
| Petruchio             | Alfred Lunt        |
| Gremio                | S. Thomas Gomes    |
| Widow                 | Edith King         |
| Maid                  | Grace McGrath      |
| Urtis                 | Edith King         |
| Servants to Petruchio |                    |
| Nathaniel             | Gilmore Bush       |
| Joseph                | Ralph Nelson       |
| Gregory               | Robert Downing     |
| Philip                | Philip Bourneuf    |
| Cook                  | Gordon Mills       |
| Haberdasher           | Cameron Mitchell   |
| Tailor                | Charles Bowden     |
| A Pedant              | William Le Massena |
| Vincenzo              | Victor Thorley     |
| Officer               | Ralph Nelson       |
| A Prisoner            | Cameron Mitchell   |
| Horses                | Harry Re Gar       |
| A Singer              | Don Morrell        |
|                       | Alex Courtney      |

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, February 6, 1940

## The Taming of the Shrew Hysterical One-Ring Circus

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THE Alfred Lunt-Lynn Fontanne version of "The Taming of the Shrew," amended and improved until it now resembles a hysterical one-ring circus, is assuredly the most riotously funny performance of the venerable farce since the days of Shakespeare. If there is any single regret attached to this uproarious production, it is only that its engagement at the Alvin Theater is limited to one short week.

But for this week, at least, the Lunts and their talented and enthusiastic troupe are performing a double benefit—for the relief of the worthy Finns and for the relief of the faded theater-goers.

When one uses the word "circus" to describe the treatment of this comedy of the war of the sexes, that is no figure of speech. It has in it curiously constructed horses, tumblers, clowns, acrobats, mountebanks, jongleurs, and dwarfs. It is a carnival of hilarity, splashed with medieval color.

Those who were fortunate enough to have seen the earlier production by the Lunts assure me, delightedly, that in its present form it is even more high spirited. I am ready to believe it.

Perhaps the outstanding quality of the re-

vival is its capacity to make an audience feel that it is actually participating in the play. The fun does not stop at the footlights. In an upper tier box we have Richard Whorf, giving a drunkenly eloquent portrayal of the magnificent toad-pot, Christopher Sly, and fixing himself in acrobatic postures wherein he is likely to break his neck some night. It is a gorgeous, if perilous performance, and it stamps Mr. Whorf as one of the greatest young comedians on the American stage today.

With Christopher Sly as a fellow member of the audience, and with Mr. Lunt and Miss Fontanne pointing their asses and explana-

tions directly at the customers, a certain spirit of co-operation is achieved on all sides and the humor becomes so infectious that the whole house is at last swept into a companionable delirium.

This, one feels, is exactly what Shakespeare intended and it makes one lose patience with those few pedants who are shocked because of the liberties that are taken with the text. It is true, as Prof. Hazelton Spencer complains, that the Lunts "overacted" (a mild term for their actual performance). It may also be true, as the professor points out, that "there is not the slightest justification, textual or historical, for turning the role of Petruchio into one long riot of whip-cracking." But the answer to it is that the result justifies the means. It is farce, played with all the abandon and exaggeration required by farce.

Incidentally, as the program points out, the prompt book which serves as a guide for this performance "incorporates some small part of the long-neglected Christopher Sly dialogue to be found in A Pleasant Conceited Historie, called The Taming of a Shrew, an earlier play which William Shakespeare must have read and may have written."

The Lunts, at any rate, play all this with their customary sparkling humor, in a railing, mocking and rollicking spirit that warms the heart. In addition to their splendid teamwork and the masterpiece of character acting by Mr. Whorf, you are treated to the subtle and sly wit of Sydney Greenstreet, and the gay co-operation of a well-trained company in general.

In a brief curtain speech last night, Mr. Lunt advised Herbert Hoover, chairman of the Finnish Relief Fund, that the first performance had brought more than \$5000 to the cause.

# "The Taming of the Shrew"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, February 6, 1940

## Lunt's and Fontanne's 'Taming of the Shrew' Comes Back for the Finnish Relief Fund

By BROOKS ATKINSON

FINLAND'S loss is our gain this week. In support of the Finnish Relief Fund, Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne have brought back their incomparable version of "The Taming of the Shrew," which they acted at the Alvin last evening. More than four years have gone by since this bit of Shakespearean horseplay first convulsed Fifty-second Street in the Guild Theatre just across the way, and almost two years have passed since the Lunts last appeared in New York. Even without "The Shrew" it would cheer up the town to see the Lunts enjoying themselves on a stage again, and with "The Shrew" reunion becomes carnival. For their staging of the familiar farce by Shakespeare is one of the theatre's master works. One week is much too short to have another look at it. Every theatregoer ought to add this production to his memory-book of creative theatre.

Technically, it is a revival. And it would actually be a revival if the Lunts were not calling the tune. One of the most remarkable things about them is the enthusiasm they preserve about their work in the theatre. They are never finished with anything they are doing. And their "Shrew" antic is a case in point. It is not only exuberant in every detail, but a little milder than it was on the memorable evening of Sept. 30, 1935, when it first opened in Gotham and added uproarious-

ness to an ancient farce. Look closely and you may find an idea from "Amphitruon 33" in it now. And how about that dead fish that crossed the stage for a laugh in "The Sea Gull"? Hasn't Mr. Lunt put it into a bird cage now? At any rate, Miss Fontanne and he have raised the curtain with as much eagerness as though they had never staged "The Shrew" before.

For this theatregoer's personal enjoyment they have painted the lily a trifle too gaudily. Like a three-ring circus, which is perhaps the model, it is too full of material, and it begins to lack spontaneity. All the details are worked a little too hard; and the deliberation of the plan begins to show through.

But if this is a fault, it is on the right side. For the masquing, the vaudeville, the band, the buffoonery, the carnival singing, the acrobatics, the costumes, the candid scenery and Richard Whorf's clowning as Christopher Sly make a "Taming of the Shrew" that accepts the original Elizabethan plan of trumpery farce and adds to it all the gagging of fond old theatre. It is inspired barnstorming by a troupe of singularly accomplished comedians.

Broad as the general style of fooling may be, there are subtleties enough in the acting. Not everything is bounce and physical mummery. For Mr. Lunt and Miss Fontanne, and also Sydney Greenstreet, who is their most valiant prime minister, can give a line a comic edge by intonation, gleam or expert timing. They're the best actors for classical-farce and historical-comical occasions. And as usual you will find them surrounded with a company that is worthy of them, and that probably reflects honesty of leadership. Fay Baker, Philip Bourmont, Byron McGrath, Francis Compton, Alan Hewitt, Norman Stuart, Edith King and the others play like free artists caught up in the merriment of a good time on the stage.

Many thanks to every one concerned for the good-will, skill and high spirits. Among the things Finland has accomplished is a glimpse of our most cheerful actors in one of their happiest improvisations. For only one week, folks!

Alfred Lunt, in a certain speech after the performance of "The Taming of the Shrew," announced that last night's receipts amounted to \$2,032, which will go to the Finnish Relief Fund. He introduced Herbert Hoover, national chairman of the fund, who noted that it was unprecedented to give a whole week of benefit performances and expressed his thanks to Mr. Lunt and his wife, Lynn Fontanne. Before the brief ceremony the stage couple and their supporting cast were called upon to take numerous curtain calls.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, February 6, 1940

## Re-Enter the Lunts in "The Taming of the Shrew"

By WILELLA WALDORF

WITH Christopher Sly occupying one stage box, and Ex-President Hoover in the other, "The Taming of the Shrew" began a full week's engagement at the Alvin Theatre last night for the benefit of the Finnish Relief Fund. Mr. Hoover remarked in a brief speech at the end of the play that it is unprecedented for a production of this kind to give a full week of benefit performances, and Alfred Lunt, speaking for the company, said that the receipts for the opening night were \$3,032.

"We have traveled 33,000 miles," Mr. Lunt told the enthusiastic audience, "and we are slightly damaged, but willing."

Very little damage was visible, however. For a production that has been barnstorming over the country since last autumn, and has seen plenty of service in past seasons, "The Taming of the Shrew," as devised by the Lunts, is still remarkably fresh. The spirit, if anything, is even gayer than of yore, and long practice has added a smoothness and ease to the ensemble that shows very little tendency to degenerate into mere stock routine. This is an achievement of no mean order, and says much for the esprit de corps.

### Kate the Huntress

Miss Fontanne and Mr. Lunt have added a number of delightful touches to the hilar-

ous performances they first gave in the roles here in 1935, and the new entrance devised for Miss Fontanne since then is every bit as funny as it sounded in reports from the road. Preceded by dunkeys bearing the corpses of sundry animals, Katherine the Shrew strides in from the hunt, mounts the balcony of her father's house, and fires a final shot, bringing down several geese.

Mr. Lunt himself still enters on his incredible horse and the riotous scenes between Petruchio and Kate are played with tremendous gusto, embroidered with a thousand bits of business invented by the pair in the course of their long association with the roles.

### A Good Company

With one or two exceptions, the supporting company seems better than the original one. Richard Whorf as Christopher Sly, Sydney Greenstreet as Baptista and Alan Hewitt as Lucentio are among the old-timers who are again comfortably at home in their respective parts, and the general level is highly competent.

The only bit of casting that we might quarrel with is if we felt in a less mellow mood would be that of Fay Baker as Bianca. Heaven knows Bianca is a thankless part at best, and is generally played in milk-and-water fashion by an anemic female lacking in spirit and sparsely endowed with brains. Miss Baker goes to the other extreme and makes her not only spirited, but much too sophisticated. There is not enough contrast between her performance and that of Miss Fontanne's as the Shrew.

But it is foolish to carp over trifles, for this is a delightful production, even more amusing than it was when first it burst upon Broadway. It is heart-warming to have Miss Fontanne and Mr. Lunt back again, and distressing that they appear determined to remain with us only one short week out of a whole season.

### Greeting Late Comers

Incidentally they are dealing with late comers very thoroughly at the Alvin. When two tardy arrivals strolled down the aisle after the curtain had been up for some time, Christopher Sly began a hubbub from his vantage point in the box and attracted the attention of Mr. Lunt and several fellow players, in the midst of a scene on the stage. Stopping and bowing low, the actors went through part of the scene again for the couple, lest they miss some of the plot. We understand this technique has worked very well on the road tour of late, where some of the most important people being greeted with a flourish and the repetition of a scene for their special benefit.



# "The Taming of the Shrew"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, February 6, 1940

## Gala Performance of "Shrew" For Mr. Hoover and the Finns

"The Taming of the Shrew," comedy by William Shakespeare. Revived for the benefit of the Finnish Relief Fund at the Alvin Theatre, New York, Feb. 5, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

EVERYTHING was pretty gala at the Alvin Theatre last night. The Lunts were home to give a week of their time and all their receipts for a week's revival of "The Taming of the Shrew" to Herbert Hoover's Finnish Relief fund.

Herbert Hoover sat in a box and smiled receptively, both at the performance and the tribute of applause the audience gave him.

Gertrude Lawrence sold souvenir programs and John Golden served as the Hoover party's usher.

The Lunts were in fine fettle. Miss Fontanne, who spent last week in a hospital bed, was as lively and chipper as a perfect convalescent could be. Mr. Lunt was his amiable and capable self.

Both played with more assurance, naturally, than they did their opening night at the Guild in September, 1935. Both have added bits of business to their rollicking performances and to the Shakespearean romp as a whole.

The amusing impertinence of speaking to latecomers was put on, either to add a touch to this particular opening, or because it has been added to the regular order of the program.

### Added Business

It happened first, by report from Los Angeles, when Sir Alfred stepped out of char-

acter one night to explain to a noisy party of late arrivals that the play had been going on for several minutes, and that, with their permission, he would explain for their benefit a part of what they had missed. Which he proceeded to do to the delight of the audience.

He did this last night, when a trio of latecomers took seats in the second row. This being a season of stage liberties, and the spirit of the Lunt-Fontanne version of "The Shrew" being what it is, it is a happy addition to the festivities.

Three years of playing has noticeably smoothed the performance and the added incidents are all good fun. Richard Whorf's

Christopher Sly does everything now but tumble out of the box and sit in the audience's lap. This gives the clown added importance and tightens up the informal nature of the revs.

### Stars Shine

Miss Fontanne's Katherine is a fiery spitfire and her appearance seemed to me to be toned down a bit. There was less of the Oriental suggestion in her facial makeup. She is a quite beautiful Shrew through her early scene of defiance (the best of the farce) and an incredibly bedraggled one after the devastating wedding journey.

There is a sleekness and a vigor expressed in Mr. Lunt's Petruchio that are most satisfying. His added confidence and authority invite the hope that he may add still other classical revivals to the repertory of this, our finest acting couple.

The supporting company has been slightly changed. Richard Whorf, as noted, remains the best of Christophers. Sydney Greenstreet is again the hefty and amusing Baptista. Alan Hewitt is still the Tranio, and Edith King is still doubling the Widow and Curtis.

There is a new Bianca in Fay Baker, a new Lord in Philip Burneuf, a new Gremio in Francis Compton.

If the acrobats are the same they have taken on weight, and if the clowning dwarfs have been changed I wouldn't know it. The Claggett Wilson costumes and the Carolyn Hancock setting are as bright and fresh as though they had never been touring.

The admission this week is at the scale of \$2.75 top, without tax, which makes the benefit inviting to small budgets as well as to sympathetic supporters of doughty little Finland.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, February 6, 1940

## Shakespeare's Vaudeville

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

MISS FONTANNE and Mr. Lunt once more achieve the miraculous feat of making "The Taming of the Shrew" seem a funny show. Returning to the city for one week in the interest of Finnish relief, these two delightful performers, who have been missing from our midst far too long, bring back their widely traveled production of this far from hilarious classic, and I can only say that it is bigger and better than ever. It seems rowdier, racier, more inventive and more irreverent this time and, because the stars play it with imagination and gusto, the outmoded farce comes to brilliant and hearty life and must now be set down as one of the great Shakespearean productions of our time. It seems to me, for example, at least five times as entertaining as it was when Miss Fontanne and Mr. Lunt first did it several years ago.

There are only two things that can be done to enliven "The Taming of the Shrew" these days. Either it can be cut to forty-five minutes' running time, as was done at the World's Fair last year, or it can be brightened up by the addition of enough antic slapstick to make one overlook the fatuousness of the story and the endless complexities of the subplots. Miss Fontanne and Mr. Lunt, you will remember, determined on the second

course, and, when the Theater Guild first offered their version. It went in for handsome stretches of incidental humor and comic business. The only trouble then was that there wasn't enough interpolated high jinks. Over the course of the seasons the stars have remedied this defect, adding innumerable inventive whimsies, hearty quips and rowdy gags, and transforming their presentation into the sort of rapidly paced classical vaudeville that it should be. The result is a "Taming of the Shrew" merrier than you could well imagine it.

As in their original version, the Lunts have not neglected the alcoholic tinker, Christopher

Sly, who sits in a stage box and interferes with the proceedings from time to time. Richard Whorf, who plays the infuriated Christopher, has a lot of time to sit in that box and brood, and he has obviously employed his evenings wisely. His portrayal has grown richer and more lively. Just as the production has, and whether he is interrupting the activities on the stage or heckling the late comers in the audience, he adds considerably to the entertainment of the show. Another unusual virtue of "The Taming of the Shrew" is the presence of an amusing Baptista. The shrew's father rarely seems a comic fellow in the theater or in the library, but the able Sydney Greenstreet manages to enliven the role with great good humor, and another unexpected pleasure is added to the performance.

The performances of the two stars have grown in richness and variety, and now Miss Fontanne's Katherine and Mr. Lunt's Petruchio must be placed among their most attractive characterizations. The smaller roles, too, are effectively managed, and even the most negligible of the Shakespearean clowns are humorously interpreted. The settings and costumes continue to be attractive and imaginative, and about the whole production there is a naturally festive air that is happily different from the customary mood of grimly determined and entirely academic high spirits to be found in Shakespearean comedies not directed by Miss Margaret Webster. Somehow I cannot help thinking that the transformation of "The Taming of the Shrew" into a good show is one of the modern miracles of the theater, and I wish that Miss Fontanne and Mr. Lunt wouldn't leave us after their week of labor for the Finnish Relief Fund.

# "My Dear Children"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, February 1, 1940

## John Barrymore Plays Straight And Fools the Firstnighters

"My Dear Children," comedy by Catherine Turney and Jerry Horwin. Produced by Aldrich & Myers at the Belasco Theatre, New York, Jan. 31, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THE one-time leader of the American theatre came home last night after seventeen adventurous years in the West and disappointed the first-nighters swarmed to meet him at the Belasco Theatre by playing the hero of a comedy called "My Dear Children" straight. They had expected him to "gag" it.

He played as straight, at least, as it is possible for this Barrymore to play this particular part at this stage of his career. The part itself is that of a bad actor, who is also a minor alcoholic. John has been up in both these parts for a good many years.

The general result was one of success touched with pity. The Barrymore comedy sense, which tips a line with laughter and drives a gesture straight into the funny bone of any average audience, was often definitely in evidence.

When it was, the audience was happy. Disappointed that the gags were not thicker and more obvious, apparently, but happy because this flash of the old Barrymore was satisfying.

### Sober Moments

The Barrymore sense of drama also flashed occasionally in scenes in which the play actor in the play tried to reconcile the adventures of his three daughters with what he conceived to be the paternal protection he should show them.

In these moments the audience's titters were quieted and there was a respectful hush. It happened, too, when Barrymore read the "To be or not to be" soliloquy as he mused on a picture of himself in the role of Hamlet. But only for a moment.

Then the clowning actor snapped out of his sobered bit and settled back into his imitation of what he himself might describe as a hinterland ham.

As entertainment the Barrymore circus is three-star, because he makes it so. As for the report of his deliberately clowning the part, that, too, is true to a degree. But any way he played it would still seem to be clowning. His experience in Chicago has made him terrifically audience conscious, and he probably never has given so thoroughly, uneven a characterization, or one

more lacking in proportion, in all the years he has played.

Which is where you who have tears shed over the loss of the American theatre's onetime leader may prepare to shed them.

### Good Farce

"My Dear Children" has a good farcical foundation. A much-married matinee idol is caught up during an affair with a Countess in a Swiss chateau by the arrival of three of his daughters.

His efforts to carry on with the Countess and still take a hand in the protection of his newly discovered children develops a variety of amusing situations and the scattering of bright lines is good average.

The fun is mostly Barrymore fun, however, and largely dependent upon your liking for our first stage family and your reaction to their particular fascination.

### All for Lionel

As Ethel and John have grown older, and especially with Ethel devoting herself to nonagenarians and John to eccentric actors, they both are beginning to act and look like Lionel. Which, inasmuch as they are agreed that Lionel is the finest actor of the three, probably makes for family satisfaction.

In Mr. Barrymore's support Arnold Korff fluffs through a character part as an exuberant major-domo. The daughters are nicely realized by Patricia Waters, Doris Dudley (who is the one who gets spanked and takes the humiliation gracefully), and Lois Hall. Tala Birell plays the Countess. The direction was by Otto Preminger and an Oenslager setting is serviceable.

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, February 1, 1940

## John Barrymore Appears in "My Dear Children" at the Belasco

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

JOHN BARRYMORE came back last evening, riding jauntily enough in a one-horse shay. He turns handsprings now and then and makes faces, but advance report has somewhat exaggerated the extravagance of the occasion. Mr. Barrymore does not remain strictly within the confines of his character in "My Dear Children," but he stays in the general vicinity. Those who look for plotless vaudeville at the Belasco will be somewhat disappointed.

Catherine Turney and Jerry Horwin have written a great deal of play for Mr. Barrymore. They have invented for him the character of a declining but still

boisterous actor, precariously in residence at some one else's castle in the Swiss Alps. On a single night three daughters, products of an active matrimonial career, drop in on him. All bring their problems and their young men, and all bestow their difficulties on father. Father worries a lot, very expressively. The action is developed, as the action in the inset plays so often is, in a series of dialogues. Miss Turney and Mr.

Horwin haven't written much of this very interestingly.

It would be agreeable to skip over "My Dear Children" and get to Mr. Barrymore. But it is pretty difficult to skip over a play which begins at 8:45 and ends at 11:45 and depends entirely on its star for its entertainment. That is not a skip. It's a pole vault. I think this fact must be mentioned to Mr.

Barrymore and Richard Aldrich and Richard Myers, who have issued solid bronze memorial tickets for the occasion.

Until the last act Mr. Barrymore is rather intently Allan Manville, the gay old reprobate in the Alps. He kides the part a bit. His starts of surprise are whimsically exaggerated bounds. His facial expressions are contortional. In the grip of emotions he totters perilously and when he hits a juicy line he beamingly squeezes it dry and grimaces his appreciation at the audience. It is dexterity gone haywire; assurance and skill turned gayly into a joke upon themselves. And it is pretty funny; not screamingly funny, but pretty funny. In the last act he laments the fickleness of his whiskey, amuses the audience and his fellow actors with asides and, in one shuddery moment, murmurs abstractedly that he has confused himself with Lionel.

And with all this he manages to make "My Dear Children" sufficiently amusing when he is on the stage. It would be more fun, I think, to see him act in a good play, and act seriously. Certainly it would be more fun to see him act with less glacial-like deliberation. But it is pretty good fun this way. Hardly tedious at all, really.

Mr. Barrymore's subordinates in the cast are, generally, a little meek and seldom raise their voices. Miss Doris Dudley does a pleasant job as the most animated of the daughters, and Patricia Waters is allowed some moments of her own and makes the best of them. But the assisting members of the cast are merely props for Mr. Barrymore. Probably they are all going to end up with something pretty fancy in the way of repressions.

# "My Dear Children"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, February 1, 1940

## Prodigal's Return

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

ANYTHING seemed more than likely to happen at the Belasco Theatre last night, where the season's swankiest audience was gathered together in solemn conclave to see John Barrymore give his first local show in some eighteen years. As a matter of fact, things went off rather quietly, with the hero of the occasion looking somewhat fatigued, apparently keeping his antics down to a minimum and indulging in his famous ad libs only in the third act of a play that, thanks to the star's leisureliness, seemed almost as long as "Gone With the Wind." The spectators obviously wanted to see the great man cut loose and, when he declined to do so, there were certain signs of disappointment. Yet if Mr. Barrymore was slightly sedate for a star of his epic reputation he was still the life of the party, carrying his feeble vehicle with jaunty nonchalance and demonstrating for old and young that, even if he is not the Barrymore of 1922, he is still among the giants.

The fact that the star of "My Dear Children" seemed somewhat under wraps for a Barrymore doesn't mean that his performance was exactly a modest one. He strutted and minced and waved an imperious finger and did tricks with his face and voice. He was so quiet that he seemed to be whispering his lines and he shouted loud enough to fill the theater. He posed and wore trick costumes and once, just as his play was beginning to seem a musical show libretto without music, he atoned for his vehicle's lack by bursting into song. Then at the beginning of the third act he began the soliloquy from "Hamlet" that he had done so thrillingly in 1922 and once more we were all reminded that here is the greatest actor of his time, shocking us all just a little bit

by the waste of his incomparable talents but proving his stature and his mettle by the mere fact that when he does go in for clownish antics he manages even them on an epic scale.

Clearly, Mr. Barrymore was determined, with a fine grimace, to go through with his role amid less ribaldry than Chicago has given him credit for and the strain on him was noticeable. I think that the audience sympathized with him in his great trial, and when, in the last act, he poured himself a property drink and cried out a heartfelt "If this was only real," he received an acclamation second only to that bestowed upon him when he made his first entrance to applause that was genuinely fervent. The strain was thereupon lifted a bit, and it wasn't long before Mr. Barrymore, in the midst of additional antics, suddenly remarked that they were Lionel's. A few minutes later he paused after one of his speeches and sneered at it scornfully. Every one felt happier at this point, and there is reason to believe that it was during these few minutes that we were given a slight foretaste of what the star's work

### 'MY DEAR CHILDREN'

A comedy in three acts by Catherine Turney and Jerry Horwin; directed by Otto L. Premlinger; setting by Donald Oenslager; presented at the Belasco Theatre on January 31, 1940, by Richard Aldrich and Richard Myers. The cast: Kleinbach.....Arnold Korff  
Reed Hanson.....Otto Hulett  
Portia Trent.....Patricia Waters  
Titcomb.....George Reynolds  
Felice, Countess de Brittonne, Tala Birell  
Allan Manville.....John Barrymore  
Albert.....Roland Hogue  
Miranda Burton.....Lois Hall  
Cordelia Clark.....Doris Dudley  
Leo Stevenson.....Kenneth Tresser  
Willard Nelson.....Philip Reed  
Jacques Korbl.....Stiano Braggiotti  
Ernst Van Betke.....Leo Chalzel

will be like in future performances. Even New York will hardly awe John Barrymore for long.

Incidentally, there are other actors in the cast, in addition to a sort of plot. The plot need hardly be mentioned, since the only interesting moments in it are purely autobiographical, but the players deserve some slight mention if only for courage. Considering everything, the supporting cast is a gallant one. There is an attractive performance by Miss Patricia Waters as one of the star's daughters, and the Misses Lois Hall and Doris Dudley are effective as the other children. That good actor, Arnold Korff, has a small role, and Philip Reed and Kenneth Tresser appear helpfully as a pair of unworthy suitors. Thanks to the manner in which the first-night performance ran on and on, I was forced to dash to a typewriter before the play was over, and it appears that I missed a bit of last-minute excitement. Anyway, Mr. Barrymore is making a show of himself in "My Dear Children," and I suppose he should be a little bit ashamed of it, but he is still our great actor.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, February 1, 1940

## "My Dear Children" Opens At the Belasco Theatre

John Barrymore Returns to Broadway Via the Middle West

By WILELLA WALDORF

LAST night's opening at the Belasco Theatre was a farce by Catherine Turney and Jerry Horwin entitled "My Dear Children," concerning the irresponsible antics of an aging romantic actor at a chateau in the Swiss Alps where he is visited, without warning, by three daughters named for Shakespearean heroines: Portia, Miranda and Cordelia.

In the ordinary course of Broadway events the play would have been over a bit before eleven, paddled indulgently by the critics next morning, and on its way to the warehouse Saturday night.

It so happens, however, that the producers, Mr. Aldrich and Mr. Myers, some time ago induced John Barrymore to return to the stage in it, and after a mild start on the road, amazing tales began to drift back to New York from the Middle West.

Mr. Barrymore, it was reported, was apt to do the most startling things. Furthermore, if he felt in the mood he would SAY anything that occurred to him, often abandoning the script entirely and addressing the audience vigorously and at length. An Omaha women's club was shocked at his language. Chicago kept "My Dear Children" running for months simply because people kept going back night after night in the hope that Mr. Barrymore would do something outrageous. Pittsburgh

swooned at his feet, Cleveland roared, Detroit guffawed.

The audience that paid \$5.50 for orchestra seats last night at the Belasco naturally expected a dramatic "Heliogabbus," with Ringling Brothers-Barnum and Bailey thrown in. If Mr. Barrymore had made his entrance shot out of a cannon into a net, leading Gargantua by the hand, it would have been only mildly surprising.

Mr. Barrymore did nothing of the sort. After a few discreet off-stage noises, he simply walked in and took off his overcoat, revealing the Barrymore form clad in evening trousers and a shirt. Later he appeared in Tyrolean costume (bare knees), a chef's hat and apron, something vaguely Shakespearean,

and an old smoking outfit, plus bedroom slippers.

The farce crawled forward in so leisurely a fashion and the intermissions were so long that the final curtain did not descend until a quarter before twelve. Long before that time, it must be confessed, this reviewer, for one, was tired out, even a bit depressed.

Not that there are no laughs to be had at "My Dear Children." Mr. Barrymore is sometimes very comic, coyly burlesquing an elderly actor who was once a great Hamlet. The play itself, poor thing, occasionally comes out with a funny moment all its own.

But it may as well be admitted here and now that the big moments in "My Dear Children," if any, are going to be those supplied by Mr. Barrymore off the record, and last night he was sticking pretty close to the business in hand, clowning around, leering, agitating his eyebrows, and speaking his lines with great deliberation. Never, perhaps, has a farce proceeded at a slower pace than did the farce that opened at the Belasco last night. At one point the star sang "The Owl and the Pussycat" for what seemed like hours.

The third act, which did not get under way until time for the morning paper critics to depart for their respective offices, proved to be at once the shortest, the liveliest and the most cheerful of the three, which is not saying very much, and in it Mr. Barrymore introduced a few quips, imitating Brother Lionel at one point, and ejaculating, "God! I wish this was real!" when drinking stage whiskey.

Whether this was new or merely something regularly introduced to keep things bubbling along, we have no way of knowing, and shall certainly not return to find out.

It is in the third act that Mr. Barrymore speaks part of the "To be or not to be" soliloquy from "Hamlet." We never saw him in that role, and shall always regret it. The supporting cast is an excellent one, including good performances by Doris Dudley, Lois Hall, Kenneth Tresser, Stiano Braggiotti, Patricia Waters, Tala Birell, Arnold Korff, Roland Hogue, Leo Chalzel, Philip Reed, Otto Hulett. There were times when Mr. Barrymore's fellow players were more overcome with mirth than many in the audience.



# "My Dear Children"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, February 1, 1940

## John Barrymore Returns to New York After 17 Years—Acts Chief Part in 'My Dear Children'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

**A**LTHOUGH John Barrymore is merely clowning in "My Dear Children," which was acted at the Belasco last evening, there is no doubt about his ability. He is still the most gifted actor in this country. During the seventeen years he has spent away from Broadway he has held his talents cheap, and the record is not a pretty one in his appearance. He has aged more than seventeen years. In the first act last evening he looked weary, although, incidentally, he looked entirely refreshed towards the end of the evening.

But whether he has wasted a great talent or not—and that is his own business—the fact remains that he has all the gifts an actor needs, and can use them with extraordinary versatility. His voice has wonderful resonance and color when he especially wants to use it. He has an excellent figure. He uses his hands like a master of the craft. His eyes are burning. Best of all, he has the personal magnetism that electrifies a play and an audience at the same time, and takes instant command of a whole theatre. In contrast with the Barrymore who dominated the theatre by memorable works twenty

years ago, he is a ravaged figure now. But the fact remains that he can still act like a man whom the gods have generously endowed and like a man who knows the art and the business of stage expression.

What makes the current vehicle so entertaining is his candor and wit. Catherine Turney and Jerry Horwin have written a script that he can play with relish, because it suits so well his personal experience. It tells the story of a celebrated actor and rogue whose escapades and amours are public property. For story-book purposes it introduces the actor to three of his own children

in a Swiss castle when he is in the midst of another antic.

If Mr. Barrymore were a ham, this trashy story and his appearance in it might be a pathetic ordeal for his old admirers. But he is a wit. He plays it with an alert sense of mischief. It is gruff Jack, gay Jack, my Jack, mad Jack in a lacy flow of gleaming inconsequentialities. The Barrymore breeding keeps him master of silly material, and the tricks he plays on it are the improvisations of a man of sharp and worldly intelligence.

Last evening he was not capering extravagantly. Although his tongue was in his cheek, he paid suitable attention to whatever business the play turned up. But he gave the audience an ironic gleam when he made his raffish entrance. He winced once or twice at a noisy guffawer in the gallery. During one scene of burlesque mumbo-jumbo he dropped a chance remark about Lionel. When he gulped a long drink at the toddy chest, he declared that he wished it were real. And when one of the daughters said, "Father, I have to have some money," he confided to the audience: "Of course, that is the louiest line in the play."

Although "My Dear Children" has the general party flavor of a barbecue, Mr. Barrymore has some good actors with him. Arnold Korff is present in a routine part. Patricia Waters, Lois Hall and Doris Dudley play the daughters with ability as well as personal enchantment. Tala Birell acts the current innamorata attractively. Otto Huelst, Stiano Braggiotti, Kenneth Treseder and Philip Reed look after the male roles agreeably. And for scenery, Donald Oenslager has designed a handsome Swiss chateau with a pleasant view from the window.

No doubt it would be more exhilarating to see an eminent actor in a part of dramatic eminence. Failing that, it is something to see him witty and gay. Although he has recklessly played the fool for a number of years, he is nobody's fool in "My Dear Children" but a superbly gifted actor on a tired holiday.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, February 1, 1940

## Barrymore Is Mild-Mannered In 'My Dear Children'

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

**T**HOSE who went to the Belasco Theater last night in hope and expectation that John Barrymore would tear his play to bits and strew the pieces all over the stage, as he is reputed to have done in Chicago, must have been surprised to see the comparatively mild-mannered Barrymore who greeted them in his highly publicized romp, "My Dear Children."

Mr. Barrymore clowning it, to be sure. He grimaced and mugged and blinked his eyes like a soubrette. He exercised his eyebrows and was in turn coy, dizzy and dazed. He adopted the happy pretense of forgetting lines in order to interpolate some of his own making. He introduced a mournful version of "The Owl and the Pussycat," and recited, half in burlesque and half seriously, Hamlet's soliloquy. He tossed an occasional aside remark into the air that might or might not have had to do with his current marital state, and he emphasized all of the personal allusions in the play that might fit into the Barrymore life.

But he didn't halt the performance to lecture, insult, annoy, applaud or praise the audience as a whole or the many individuals in it who were his friends. One wonders whether the Chicago reports were slightly exaggerated. Or whether, having taken counsel with the two Richards, Aldrich and Myers, who are his producers, he merely decided to play his role in a more restrained spirit.

There were moments, of course, when he appeared about to burst the conventional

bounds. Taking a long drink of stage Scotch and soda he declared fervently that he "wished it was real." He informed his stage butler, who was dressed for a masquerade, that he looked like a pregnant string bean. In response to his "daughter's" suggestion that "I have to have some money," he remarked in a stage whisper that "That is the louiest line in the play." When he delivered the speech wherein he is called upon to say that "Floozies behave very engagingly at times and no one knows that better than your poor old father," he nodded violent agreement with that unhappy sentiment. Once in a while he would cut short a rambling line and tell one of the other members of the cast to "Go ahead with it." Occasionally he paused long enough to give a brief stage instruction.

"You've paused just long enough," he told Miss Doris Dudley. "The pause is a very

effective instrument." When he was called upon to spank Miss Dudley he did so thoroughly and vigorously, but apparently without the realism that, according to rumors, so incensed Miss Elaine Barry (Miss Dudley's predecessor) that she left the company in an exquisite dudgeon.

It is unnecessary to criticize Mr. Barrymore's acting, for all this can hardly be summed up as acting. He deliberately cut great slices of ham into the performance, chewing scenery and mouthing round phrases in the exaggerated manner of the pretentious Shakespearian actors of the dead past. It was a burlesque.

The audience heartily approved of these goings-on and would have liked more. After all, that is what they came for. The play itself did not and does not matter, and it probably would fall flat on its nose without the peculiar Barrymore treatment.

"My Dear Children" is a caricature of an aging actor who is about to embark on a final amatory adventure when three of his children, born of forgotten marriages, descend upon his love nest and ask his aid in straightening out their own confused love life. All you need to know about it is that he accomplishes that worthy purpose and, in addition, puts himself back on the road to the theater again.

The three daughters are Patricia Waters, Lois Hall and Miss Dudley, and they form a pleasing and lovely trio. Miss Waters is a newcomer with considerable charm. Miss Hall reminds me of Betty Fields; which is the highest compliment that could be bestowed on her. And Miss Dudley seems to be gaining in poise and self-possession, particularly under what must be diverting circumstances. Mr. Barrymore is the only important male figure on the stage, but he has competent support.

The audience cheered Mr. Barrymore's return after these years, in a way that certainly must have been heart-warming to him, and he responded in a brief and simple curtain speech of thanks, after he had been once interrupted by a peculiarly rapid attempt by an unemployed actor in the audience to turn the proceedings into a gabfest.

# "Geneva"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, January 31, 1940

## Bernard Shaw Talks of Europe's Troubles in 'Geneva,' at Henry Miller's

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

NEITHER his own age nor tragic complexity of world events can diminish the mental productivity of George Bernard Shaw. "Geneva," which opened at Henry Miller's last evening, is filled with Shavian ideas on all manner of things—on dictatorship and democracy and the horrors of war and the blind hates which make it impossible for men to live together peaceably. The quality of these ideas is not, however, what it used to be.

It may be partly that the world's confusion is now too great to be resolved by any one playwright, and even by Mr. Shaw. While "Geneva" toured Canada, Mr. Shaw revised it, trying diligently by air mail

to keep up with the turmoil of events; trying, no doubt, to achieve each evening reflections suitable to the day's happenings. This is an arduous way to write plays, and it seems not to be a very good one. Some of the dramatic muddle of "Geneva" probably results from this mad scramble to keep up.

But with all allowances made, "Geneva" is still far from good Shaw. It begins rather vaguely in the office of the International Committee for Intellectual Co-operation, an agency of the League of Nations. To the Cockney young woman, who is about all there is to this imposing committee, various people come, seeking redress against dictators and a general reorganization of the world. A Jew wants something done about a dictator named Battler; a Bishop seeks to have the communists attended to and a Soviet Commissar arrives to complain of Church of England missionaries who are seeking to undermine socialism. A widow of a, presum-

ably, Central American republic, has a long, vague complaint to make.

Mr. Shaw rambles on, not precisely sparkling. He gets somewhat, his dramatically, up on charges before the World Court at The Hague. Battler appears, with a black lock over his forehead and the staring eyes of madness. Bombardone arrives, dressed in a toga. General Flanco de Fortinbras enters to explain that the civil war in which he has just been victorious was merely a battle of gentlemen against cads. The British Foreign Secretary suavely defends his country's always anomalous position. Everybody debates, inconclusively and at length. Only word that Battler's armies have invaded Ruritania—that inevitably mythical battleground—puts a period to the discussion. The Foreign Secretary then announces, a little reluctantly, that it is time to "knock the stuffing" out of Battler. (Cheers.)

### 'GENEVA'

A play in two acts by George Bernard Shaw; staged by Maurice Colbourne; presented at Henry Miller's Theater on January 30, 1940, by Gilbert Miller, in association with Mr. Colbourne and Barry Jones. The cast:

|                                             |                    |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Begonia Brown.....                          | Norah Howard       |
| A Jew.....                                  | Beckett Bould      |
| A Newcomer.....                             | Harvey Braban      |
| A Widow.....                                | Susan Turner       |
| A Journalist.....                           | Jack Brown         |
| A Bishop.....                               | T. Renaud Lockwood |
| Commissar Posky.....                        | Earle Grey         |
| The Secretary of the League of Nations..... | Cyril Gardiner     |
| An Usher.....                               | Gerald Vane        |
| Sir Orpheus Midlander.....                  | Lawrence Hanray    |
| The Judge.....                              | Barry Jones        |
| The Betrothed.....                          | Patrick Ludlow     |
| Bombardone.....                             | Ernest Borrow      |
| Battler.....                                | Maurice Colbourne  |
| A Soldier.....                              | Patrick Crean      |
| A Deaconess.....                            | Jessica Tandy      |
| Gen. Flanco de Fortinbras.....              | John Turnbull      |

There are moments of wit in this, and pleasant shafts of satire. But for the most part it is not much more than the rustling of dried leaves in a light breeze. Mr. Shaw mentions that love might be a solution or, if that is too much, tolerance. He thinks not a little can be said on all sides. He says much of it. But the electricity which was in his ideas is no longer there. The sparkle of his wit is lamentably dim against the red glare over Europe.

The acting of the English company is rather uneven. Norah Howard is amusingly sharp as Begonia Brown who, in a rather unexplained fashion, brings matters to a head. Lawrence Hanray acts the British secretary with much suave humor and Jessica Tandy is serene in a part much too small for her. Barry Jones plays with tart effectiveness. But Ernest Borrow and Maurice Colbourne are merely all right as, respectively, Bombardone-Mussolini and Battler-Hitler, and one or two of the others play a little absently. But Mr. Shaw, of course, has been a little absent too.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, January 31, 1940

## English Company Brings Bernard Shaw's 'Geneva' to N.Y. After Tour Across Canada

By BROOKS ATKINSON

MR. SHAW is not improving in his playwriting. In "Geneva," which was acted at Henry Miller's last evening, he makes logic and wisdom about great matters very difficult to listen to. It is his fiftieth play, first produced at the Malvern Festival in 1938 in another era before war broke out. As a drama, it does not differ radically from the philosophical inquiries he has been restlessly turning out for the past ten years. But it is even a little more static than "On the Rocks," which was well acted in New York in 1938.

An English company, led by Maurice Colbourne and Barry Jones, has brought "Geneva" here after an adventurous tour across Canada. Out of respect for one of the world's great men and out of courtesy to a visiting company from overseas, it would be pleasant to salute "Geneva" as at least a lively conversation piece. But in this theatergoer's opinion it is dull. For all his agility of mind, Mr. Shaw, now 83 years of age, can make the intellect seem extraordinarily futile.

Although he wrote "Geneva" before war put a full stop to all progress, Mr. Shaw has brought it up to date by announcing the out-

break of war in his last scene. But essentially, it is a drama based on the assumption that something can be done to avert the final catastrophe. Confronted by a world bullied by thunderous talk in several quarters, Mr. Shaw simplifies the situation by halting into The Hague court Mussolini, Hitler, Franco, the British foreign secretary and a representative of Soviet Russia, and charging Hitler, Mussolini and Franco with specific crimes. They all discuss each other and the philosophy of government at random. Finally the

judge and Mr. Shaw both conclude that "man is a failure as a political animal."

Some of the talk is frisky; some of it has the wit of good theatrical speech. When the old humors possess him, Mr. Shaw can amusingly ridicule the respectability of a stupid English girl, and he shakes his slapstick breezily at an English bishop listening to the cold logic of a Communist diplomatist. Although Mr. Shaw continues to spoof the complacent dullness of English government, his attitude has some of the affection of a father toward a wayward son. And his humorous description of British foreign policy, proceeding day by day by improvisation, seems almost engaging in contrast with Hitler's technique of direct action. But the scene before The Hague court is virtually static, and the conversation is diffuse and scrappy. Mr. Shaw's theme is general and his prophet's energy is spent at random.

Under Mr. Colbourne's loyal direction, "Geneva" is staged as well as the circumstances permit. Harry Jones plays the part of the judge with personal good humor and almost heroic interest in the court proceedings. Jessica Tandy puts her talent and beauty at the disposal of a casual part in the last act. As the British foreign secretary, Lawrence Hanray plays with considerable bland humor, especially when he has an ornate uniform to back him up. Norah Howard acts the part of a political busy-body amusingly. As Hitler and Mussolini, respectively, Mr. Colbourne and Ernest Borrow do sufficiently well with the garrulities of Mr. Shaw's cartoons. Earle Grey, Beckett Bould and John Turnbull play other parts with personal distinction.

Given a theme like this, political figures like these as characters and Mr. Shaw as author, a theatergoer naturally pricks up his ears. But Mr. Shaw as author, a theatergoer hearing in this boneless play.

# "Geneva"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, January 31, 1940

## Shaw's "Geneva" Presented At Henry Miller's Theatre

Maurice Colbourne and Barry Jones Head the British Company

By WILLELLA WALDORF

**D**URING the past few years George Bernard Shaw's plays have become so gar-  
rulous and so lacking in dramatic appeal that even the Theatre Guild stopped  
producing them some time ago. Several full-blown Shaw works have been  
duly staged in England without causing any producer on this side of the water to  
lift an eyebrow, and it had begun to appear the old gentleman might be finished  
as far as Broadway is concerned, except for revival purposes.

Last night, however, Gilbert Miller opened the elegant doors of Henry Miller's  
Theatre to a British company organized last autumn by Maurice Colbourne and

Barry Jones, London actor-managers, for a  
tour through Canada. The Messrs. Colbourne  
and Jones have traveled across the Dominion  
and back giving three plays: Mr. Colbourne's  
"Charles the King," James Bridle's "Tobias  
and the Angel" and Shaw's "Geneva." It is  
the last of these that concerns them at Henry  
Miller's.

"Geneva," listed more or less officially as  
Shaw's fiftieth play, was originally produced  
a year ago last summer during the Malvern  
Festival and was done in the autumn of 1935  
in London. It is not his latest work. Last  
summer at Malvern something called "In  
Good King Charles' Glorious Days" was pre-  
sented. "Geneva," however, is beyond all  
doubt the most timely of his treatises to  
reach the theatre of late, and he has brought  
it up to date by providing a new ending for  
the use of the Messrs. Colbourne and Jones,  
and generally keeping them abreast of the  
news from Europe by cable.

### Calling the Dictators to Court

As the title suggests, the author is con-

cerned with the League of Nations, and it  
has amused him to imagine what might hap-  
pen if the office girl of the Committee for In-  
tellectual Co-operation at Geneva were to in-  
voke the aid of the permanent court at The  
Hague on behalf of a Jew, a Democrat, a  
Widow and a Russian Commissar, all with  
grievances against sundry Fascist dictators.

Despite the fact that the League's secre-  
tary, as well as Sir Orpheus Midlander, British  
Foreign Secretary, are convinced none of  
the dictators will condescend to answer the  
summons, the Judge at The Hague proceeds  
to hold court. Whereupon Mr. Shaw devotes  
his second and final act to a rousing debate,  
oratorical exhibition and dog-fight featuring  
Herr Ernest Battler, Signor Bombardone and  
General Flanco de Fortinbras, defendants.

Neither Mr. Shaw nor the Judge attempt to  
maintain any particular order in the court,  
although the Judge does occasionally find it  
necessary to ring a dinner bell, but the war-

ring parties are on the whole content to state  
their respective cases without resorting to  
physical violence, exchanging verbal insults  
and indulging in personal bombast without  
permitting the hostilities to become so heated  
that it is necessary to call the police. Which  
is lucky since, as the Judge explains, the  
Court has no police to call.

### Some Striking Performances

The company Mr. Colbourne and Mr. Jones  
have gathered to project this Shavian talk-  
fest is a very respectable one, giving Mr.  
Shaw every bit as much help as he deserves,  
and in some instances providing remarkably  
telling character studies. Mr. Colbourne, in  
particular, is a startlingly impressive figure  
as Herr Battler in full medieval armor, plus  
swastika arm band, iron cross, small mus-  
tache, and lock of lanky black hair dripping  
over his pale forehead and flashing, fanatic's  
eye. Shaw has not intended Battler to be  
merely the usual musical comedy caricature.  
He puts into his mouth the philosophies of  
National Socialism, its pet defenses against  
Jew-baiting and the policy of arming to the  
teeth, and Mr. Colbourne's performance is  
vivid enough to give the audience an unfor-  
gettable impression of how these things  
sound when spoken by a fanatic convinced of  
their truth.

Lawrence Hanray as Sir Orpheus Mid-  
lander, who might have stepped out of a Gil-  
bert and Sullivan opera, provided a perfect  
sounding board for all of Shaw's inevitable  
quips at the expense of the empire, and Barry  
Jones, though suffering from a cold, acted the  
Judge with a good deal of intelligence and  
charm. Norah Howard was properly incisive  
as Begonia Brown, the lady from Camberwell  
who started it all, and Jessica Tandy, already  
a familiar figure on Broadway, modestly ap-  
peared as the deaconess who endeavors to  
persuade the assembled parties that the  
preachments of Christ are their only salva-  
tion.

"Geneva" finds Shaw still inclined to talk  
his audience to death, and there were those  
who slept fitfully during the two scenes of  
the first act last night. The trial scene later,  
however, succeeded in waking all but the most  
sluggish into something approaching  
enthusiasm. G. R. S. may have forgotten, or  
simply tossed overboard, what he once knew  
about writing a play, but he still has plenty  
to say that is provocative, stimulating and  
often very amusing.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, January 31, 1940

## Mr. Shaw Nods

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

**M**R. SHAW'S fiftieth play reveals the great man in the garrulous and expansive  
mood characteristic of his later period. In "Geneva" he is telling us about  
such concerns of his as war, international politics, democracy, dictatorship  
and race hatred, and, although it usually is a vast pleasure to listen to him even  
when he is inclined to ramble, I must say that this time he is merely tedious. One  
thing that must always be said for Shaw is that he does things on an epic scale,  
and when he sets out to be boring he can be as tremendous a bore as the theater  
offers. There are moments, of course, when the oldtime Shavian zest flashes forth,  
but they are few and sadly far between, and, in the end, "Geneva" becomes almost as  
great a disappointment as "The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles," hitherto his out-  
standing mishap.

This is no time for quibbling, and so there  
is no reason for objecting to the fact that the  
most important part of what might ephemer-  
ally be called the "action" of "Geneva"  
takes place in The Hague. The framework of  
the comedy has to do with the summoning be-  
fore the world court of a dictator called Battler

and another known as Bombardone, as well  
as a smaller fry described as General Flanco  
de Fortinbras, to answer charges brought  
against them by various indignant civilians.  
Of course, everybody talks, talks incessantly,  
endlessly and with what is for Mr. Shaw a  
shocking minimum of brilliance. Man, says  
the eminent Irishman, is bankrupt as a po-  
litical animal, and then, just about the time  
that this pessimistic conclusion has been  
reached, the war breaks out.

As you know, Mr. Shaw has been handling  
his play much in the manner of a topical  
revue. From time to time he sends to his  
long-suffering producer some new lines to be  
substituted for the original text in the light  
of later political developments. My impres-  
sion is that little improvement has been  
brought about as the result of this careful  
editorial supervision. Hitler, Mussolini, a  
British foreign minister, a Bolshevik, a re-  
ligious lady and other talking machines ad-  
vocate their views, and the playwright is  
rather sympathetic in giving them their say,  
but in the end it turns out that they really  
have little that is either fresh or incisive to  
discuss. On the whole, I would say that the  
British representative comes out of the dis-  
cussion best of all, and that is rather sur-  
prising, coming from George Bernard Shaw.

In this sort of static debate about the state  
of the world there is little chance for char-  
acterization on the part of the actors. Maurice  
Colbourne wears the Hitler forelock and mus-  
tache and dons a suit of armor; Ernest Bor-  
row, as Bombardone, wears a Roman toga,  
and John Turnbull, as Flanco de Fortinbras,  
doesn't seem to bother about burlesque  
make-up at all. Lawrence Hanray manages  
to be rather amusing as the British diplomat,  
Barry Jones makes a pleasant figure as  
Jessica Tandy, that excellent English ac-  
tress, is wasted on a bit. In the interest of  
reporting, it might be noted that the chief  
sign of audience approval came when Flanco  
made fun of his friend Bombardone's troops.  
Mr. Shaw really hasn't enlightened us much  
this time.



# "Geneva"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, January 31, 1940

## G. B. Shaw Meets the Dictators In a Town Hall "Geneva"

"Geneva," comedy by George Bernard Shaw. Produced by Gilbert Miller, in association with the Messrs. Colbourne and Jones, at Henry Miller's Theatre, New York, Jan. 30, 1940.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S "Geneva" is a sort of intellectual diversion in the theatre rather than a play. A Town Hall of the World with a debate on war, dictators and civilization the order of the evening.

Nice group of speakers, too—a Bombardone Mussolini, a Battler Hitler, a General Flanco de Fortinbras, an English Foreign Secretary, Sir Orpheus, with representatives of Press, Public and God sitting, as it were, on the sidelines.

The first New York audience to attend "Geneva" at Henry Miller's Theatre last night was keenly attentive and frequently amused.

The good gray crusader has not been wittier nor more hilariously satirical in any of the plays he has written the last ten years than he is in this one.

He does talk a lot, as you might expect, and perhaps he says a good deal less than he would have thought to say twenty years ago. But twenty years ago he would not have had the causes to speak for or against that the world and its destroyers have given him today.

### Criminal Dictators

As a preliminary to his debate Mr. Shaw introduces an International Committee for Intellectual Co-operation in Geneva before which appear various representatives of world problems demanding redress in the name of their several peoples.

Criminal charges are filed against the Battler Adolph, the Bombardone, and the Flanco

person and they are hailed to court. They come, looking quite like the newspaper caricatures of their principals, and boldly make their defense.

Mr. Shaw is smartly satirical in making sport of them, and in puncturing their claims to inspired powers and noble motives. The Bombardone is a thick-headed egotist aping the Caesars. The Battling Adolph is a scowling egomaniac headed for epilepsy and collapse.

The General Flanco is a pompous somebody who, having won his domination of his country with the aid of his brother dictators, plus the "masterly non-intervention policy of Sir Orpheus," is prepared to declare that the world of the future will be run by gentlemen instead of cads.

### Gentleman and Cads

"Are we cads or gentlemen?" asks the Bombardone. "You certainly are not gentlemen," answers Flanco. "You're frenks."

And dictators, assuming, as usual, that they are being complimented, accept the classification proudly.

At the height of their various serious and comic disagreements a Deaconess of the Church arrives to plead for peace in the name of a very old Saviour whose love has healed many hatreds. Of course they will have none of her—or of Him.

In the end there is a touch of the defiance that makes drama, even though Mr. Shaw has struggled manfully not to take sides, and certainly not to favor the British at whom he loves to laugh.

Word has come that, even during the conference, the Battler has invaded Ruritania. Hitler is proud to admit that while they have been talking his troops have been doing. Nor has he anything to fear. The British will never fight.

"Fight!" echoes the mild but determined Sir Orpheus. "We shall fight until everything that you represent is wiped from the face of the earth!"

It is the Russian Commissar who has the last word, really. The Battler has just boasted that his troops will sweep through Ruritania like a hurricane. "Do so, by all means, Comrade Battler," advises the Commissar; "and when you have finished you will settle with us as to how much you may keep."

The performances are all competent. The English company, organized for a Canadian tour, is headed by its organizers, Barry Jones and Maurice Colbourne, the first as the Geneva Judge and the latter as the Battler.

Jessica Tandy has the short part of the Deaconess, Lawrence Hanray is the Sir Orpheus, Norah Howard is hearty as a patriot from Fekcham and T. Renaud Lockwood offers a nice bit as a Bishop.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, January 31, 1940

## Shaw's Geneva a Study of International Turmoil

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

SOME twenty years ago, when the first World War was drawing to a close, George Bernard Shaw warned the world in a cynical drama called Heartbreak House that no solution of international madness would arrive through victory at arms; that political ineptitude, racial antagonism, parochial prejudice and hatred born of victory itself would some day set the very nations, which were then so anxious for peace, at each others' throats again.

In a historical sense, Heartbreak House now seems to have been the second act of a world drama of which we are now seeing the culmination in Shaw's play called Geneva, which was presented last night by Mr. Gilbert Miller in its American premiere.

Geneva is the realization of all the fears and forebodings that were aroused by Heartbreak House. It is the tragic conclusion of a long series of events leading inescapably to war. It is a British white paper (or rather an Irishman's green paper) explaining what has brought about the present conflict, and a fascinating document it proves to be.

Because the truths it enunciates are more or less self-evident, or perhaps because we are in agreement with Shaw's expressions—his castigation of dictatorship, his hatred of arrogant nationalism, his defense of democracy (blundering though it may be)—the new play lacks the capacity to astonish us. But the fact remains that Shaw is still capable of stating the most apparent truths in

language that is both dramatic and entertaining, and that in its best scenes, Geneva makes the efforts of the ordinary playwright seem like child's work.

If the old boy has softened at all, it is in his attitude towards England and England's share in the current misadventure in Europe. There is even an affectionate touch in his portrayal of the smug, self-satisfied, muddling but eternally right character of British statesmanship, and he reserves his venom for Hitlerism and the noisiest of his laughter for the modern Caesarism of Mussolini.

This play, as you know, was written several months before the blitzkrieg in Poland, and has been brought up to date, we are told, by subsequent amendments to fit the latest news from the capitals—and what used to be cap-

itals—of Europe. It purports to show what would happen if the dictators were actually indicted for their crimes before a court of international opinion, and, to some extent, what their defense would be. Actually, therefore, it is not a play. It is a treatise on international politics put into dramatic form. There are times when Shaw becomes tiresome with his reiteration of axiomatic truths. There are others when he becomes exciting, and the whole effect is that of a vividly illustrated lecture on the Machiavellian art of rulership, applied to this day and age.

As a historian and playwright, Shaw suffers from the troubles that beset any writer who tries to dramatize current history. The subject, in its primary horrors, is bigger than any play yet conceived or produced. But that is not to say that Shaw has written a puny attack on the frightful evils that lie at the root of war. It is sound and satisfying and it states the case clearly and definitely.

As such a document, Geneva seemed to me an extraordinarily interesting and effective experience in the theater. Certainly it could not have been better stated than by the competent company Mr. Miller brought for the most part from England, to the New York stage.

Lawrence Hanray as the British diplomat, Maurice Colbourne as Battler (Hitler), and Ernest Borrows as Bombardone (Mussolini) were especially powerful in their characterizations. Mr. Colbourne's quality of fanaticism, Mr. Hanray's phlegmatic and polite calm, Mr. Borrows' portrayal of blatant stupidity, and Mr. John Turnbull's arrogant treatment of General Flanco (you don't need to be told the symbol) were lively copies of the originals. Barry Jones played the role of the international judge with brilliance, and Miss Norah Howard and Miss Jessica Tandy upheld the feminine side of the controversy with excellent characterizations of a Camerwell maiden and an evangelist.

Geneva is the most important play to come out of London in three years. (That is said without reference to Paul Carroll's plays, which actually came out of other parts of the British Isles.) And it should be seen.

# "Young Couple Wanted"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, Jan. 25, 1940

## Manhattan Slumber

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

TWO plays in one week about young people from the countryside striving to conquer New York probably constitute a trend. Monday night Elmer Rice told us about the boy and girl pioneers in the savage forest of a great city in his "Two on an Island." Now Arthur Wilmurt speaks to us on approximately the same subject in his "Young Couple Wanted." The comparison goes no further, though, because Mr. Rice's comedy is an entertaining one and Mr. Wilmurt's work proves to be one of the bores of the year. His is a dull play about dull people in dull situations, and, instead of making Manhattan sound like an exciting, if thoughtlessly cruel, place, he manages to give the impression that it is as fatuous and feeble a locality as either youth or old age could well flee from. Somehow he invests the metropolitan district with a curiously bucolic air and even sets his hero and heroine to making a living by selling homemade jam.

One thing these plays about Manhattan, whether good or bad, have in common is a great fear of appearing unsophisticated. Inevitably the playwright, having grown pretty sentimental about his young people in love and their adventures in domesticity, begins to fear he has seemed soft and to prove that he is a hard-boiled realist at bottom, he hastily advises you that his hero and heroine haven't bothered to get married. The author of "Young Couple Wanted"—and heaven knows who wanted them—does get his young boy and girl married between the first and second acts and then sets them to battling over their economic problems. One of their friends is a radical and another a conservative, and you have some particularly uninteresting contemplations of the state of the world, which somehow interfere with the main business of the boy and girl, which is to sell that jam. By the way, the jam

is made out of grapes and peanuts, and it is the hero's plan to bill it as "Nutty Grapes—the Crazy Jam." The play is filled with whimsies like that.

It struck me that the ending of "Young Couple Wanted" was somewhat confusing, but I gathered that young Mr. and Mrs. Jones finally recognized that the city had them beaten and rushed back to the country to sell their peanuts and grapes. It seemed a surprisingly defeatist conclusion, particularly after a long rhapsodic tribute to the allurements of Manhattan in an earlier act, but by that time any conclusion to the evening's soporific was to be welcomed eagerly. Meanwhile the actors struggled gamely enough, but, I thought, without an astonishing amount of success. "Young Couple Wanted" offers nothing of merit that I could discern in writing, direction or playing. There were reports that Mr. Rice, learning of the comparative similarity of themes between his play and Mr. Wilmurt's, had been somewhat upset by the news. By now I am sure he realizes that he needn't have worried.

## 'THERE SHALL BE NO NIGHT'

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

(Continued from page 322)

break, somehow comforted by the stubborn belief that man would in the end manage to save himself. There are at least two scenes in the telling of his story that hold up the effectiveness of the drama dangerously. One occurs when he is trying to persuade his American wife that she must leave him and return to America, and the other when his son's fiancée announces that she is to have a baby, and both of them are uncomfortable interludes. So far as I can discover, too, Mr. Sherwood has no basis for his contention that the final drive of the Russians against the Mannerheim Line was led by German officers. On the whole, though, the new play is genuinely impressive.

Mr. Lunt has never been more moving nor more deeply impressive than he is as the Finnish scientist, nor has Miss Fontanne ever appeared more earnestly and beautifully than as the loyal American wife. Here are characters of stature and intellectual capacity and honest emotion, and Mr. Lunt and Miss Fontanne indicate all of these qualities with splendid clarity. Richard Whorf is admirably as the American newspaper man and radio broadcaster, who has seen totalitarianism conquer from Spain to China and has not yet changed from indignation to cynicism. It is likewise one of Mr. Whorf's best portrayals. Sydney Greenstreet is, of course, excellent as a bitter and pessimistic relative of the scientist; Maurice Colburne has an effective scene as a Nazi consul describing the pseudo-philosophy of the master race, and Miss Elizabeth Fraser is believable as the son's stalwart sweetheart. The lesser roles are credibly handled. Incidentally, Mr. Sherwood is more indignant at the German regime than at the Russian, which he regards with more disappointment than bitterness. "There Shall Be No Night" is impressive through the eloquence of its indignation.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, Jan. 25, 1940

## Young Couple Wanted, Wilmurt's New Comedy

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

DESPITE its well-intentioned and harmless comedy and its moments of excellent characterizations, Arthur Wilmurt's new play, *Young Couple Wanted*, must be listed among the inconsequential dramatic pieces of the season. It is too thin and frail to enter into spirited competition with the more robust attractions in the field of light comedy.

Like Elmer Rice's new play, *Two on an Island*—which opened Monday night—Mr. Wilmurt's play has as its theme the overcome the resistance of this heartless rapidly through a series of brisk adventures. *Young Couple Wanted* is slow in development and not particularly important when it finally reaches its mild climax.

The author seems to have begun with one theme and ended with another. He started to show that the lives of two young people, living together in companionate fashion and without benefit of aldermanic license, might be wrecked if older and less wise people forced them into a marriage for which they were economically unfitted. But the evils that actually fall upon the couple are those that might come upon any young pair in these days of economic stress. They are due to unemployment, business conditions and maladjustment, and the question of morals convention or marriage has nothing to do with the outcome.

The youthful company which Jerome Mayer gathered to perform this mild-mannered piece

strive earnestly and effectively to bring out the best of Mr. Wilmurt's lines. Hugh Marlowe, who has an excellent voice and an appealing personality, does especially well in the role of the young husband, and Richard Clark handled the character of the friend of the family with rare skill. Miss Helen Shields was captivating and vibrant in one of the best scenes of the third act which gave her an opportunity to demonstrate a surprising capacity for comedy.

Lloyd Gough, who may be remembered for his fine work in *Shadow and Substance*, manages well with a stereotyped and unympathetic role—the "cynical friend" who stands on the fringes of the household and makes wisecracks. Juliet Forbes has a part way in a part role, but she should be cautioned against a tendency to overact. Ariane Francis plays

## 'THE FIFTH COLUMN'

By JOHN MASON BROWN

(Continued from page 878)

than they do to dramatize their long-winded and extraneous romance.

### Mr. Tone at His Best

Mr. Tone is at his best as the young American who suffers from a bad case of the horrors of war. He is vigorous, tortured, debonair, admirably natural, and speaks with the passion of one who believes in what he is saying. Mr. Cobb is scarcely less admirable as a mutilated German whose life is devoted to fighting Nazism. Lenore Ulric contributes a colorful bit—part Nub, part Spanish Kiki—as a Madrid chippie. And Katherine Locke does what she can, which is often a lot, to make less tedious the unbelievable character she is asked to impersonate in the long, long love scenes that keep bogging down like a fog on the obscured virtues of the play.

Howard Bay has set "The Fifth Column" atmospherically and with skill. The Guild has cast it wisely. But the sorry truth is that, though the script is excellently acted in most cases and holds the attention fairly well, its virtues are mainly deceptive because of the lack of distinction and genuine relevance in its writing. Somehow at the end of an evening which is only pretty good, you feel as if a very skillful magician had been trying to make you believe that 1 and 1 makes 5, and as if at moments you had been fooled into believing that they did.

the part of the little wife with simplicity, but there were times when her acting seemed listless and dispirited.

Donald Oenslager did the settings, and if his stage conception of a Federal Housing Project apartment is correct, many Park Ave. residents would be glad to swap domiciles with the Knickerbocker Villagers.

# "Young Couple Wanted"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, Jan. 25, 1940

## 'Young Couple Wanted' A Dullish Piece About Love in Cold New York

"Young Couple Wanted," play by Arthur Wilmurt, produced by Jerome Mayer at Maxine Elliott's Theatre, New York, Jan. 24, 1940.

★ ★

By JOHN CHAPMAN

**A**NOTHER play about a young couple trying to get along in New York came to town last night, opening at Maxine Elliott's under the title of "Young Couple Wanted." It is amiable, rambling, unsure and not very interesting.

There had been advance talk of the similarity between this one and Monday's opener, Elmer Rice's "Two on an Island." This reporter has not yet seen the Rice production, so he couldn't make any comparisons even if they'd be useful. However, Mr. Arthur Wilmurt's piece must be like a whole lot of plays.

Boy and girl are living together, not under assumed names, to be sure, but, like the frog and the turtle in the story, under a front stoop. They are happy enough in their little hole until the girl's parents pop in from North Adams and insist upon a marriage.

### 'YOUNG COUPLE WANTED'

A play in three acts by Arthur Wilmurt; staged by Martin Gabel; settings by Donald Oenslager; presented at Maxine Elliott's Theatre on January 24, 1940, by Jerome Mayer. The cast:  
Mrs. Fitch.....Ethel Intropidi  
Mrs. Daly.....Zamah Cunningham  
Mr. Daly.....John Adair  
Jed Jones.....Hugh Marlowe  
Betty Monkline.....Juliet Forbes  
Cora Bedell.....Helen Shields  
Lewis Champion.....Lloyd Gough  
Catherine Daly.....Arlene Francis  
Donald Thompson.....Richard Clark  
Miss Muhlen.....Ruth Thane McDewitt  
George Jones.....J. Richard Jones

The youngsters had planned to marry when the right time came, but this forced wedding spoils things. Boy loses picket job. Girl loses teaching job because her school won't have a married faculty. It's a brave struggle, but New York grinds them down until at last, with new high hopes, they leave it to go into the grape-jam business on a farm.

Mr. Wilmurt has tried to get everybody in. The lovers for whom the city has little room and no help. The wealthy young radical, who talks soapbox stuff. The wealthy young conservative, whose shirt is stuffed. The easy girl who will be anybody's companion or secretary. And the girl who wants to be an artist and winds up with a job painting pictures on tarts—quite a funny idea if it weren't overplayed.

Perhaps the main trouble is that Mr. Wilmurt wrote all this as a comedy and has not managed to make it entertaining enough.

The players—Arlene Francis as the girl, the very personable Hugh Marlowe as the boy, Lloyd Gough, Juliet Forbes, Helen Shields and the others—are pleasant. Martin Gabel's direction is loose. Donald Oenslager's two sets are okay.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, Jan. 25, 1940

## "Young Couple Wanted" At the Maxine Elliott

Hugh Marlowe Seen in Arthur Wilmurt's Comedy About  
Newlyweds on Manhattan

By JOHN MASON BROWN

**C**ONTRARY to advance reports Arthur Wilmurt's "Young Couple Wanted" has little or nothing in common with Elmer Rice's "Two on an Island." To be sure, it deals with the difficulties faced by a country-bred young man and woman when they try to find places for themselves on Manhattan. But in plan and execution, in approach and treatment, the two plays are as different from each other as a diorama of the skyline is from a family portrait.

Even so there is an all-too-familiar ring about Mr. Wilmurt's comedy. Mr. Wilmurt can toss off lines from time to time which are amusing. He has a nice flair for nonsense; is aware of the conflicting viewpoints in the world around him; and puts no blinders on to face the facts of life. Yet in spite of the virtues of his writing, "Young Couple

Wanted" sounds somehow like an old and very tired victrola record.

Its tune is an old one. More specifically, it

is the same one that was far, far better orchestrated and played in "Up Pops the Devil" and "Saturday's Children." It is, in short, a tale of the trials faced by two newlyweds on this island.

For a change Mr. Wilmurt's young people finally decide to desert the city and go back to the country. But unfortunately, in describing the misadventures which tardily persuade them to make up their minds, Mr. Wilmurt leaves his subject matter just about where he found it.

### Victims of the Present

His heroine is a Newark school teacher who is forced into living with the man she loves because she would lose her job if her school board knew that she was married. The girl's parents force her into a secret marriage with her jobless lover, and the young couple's troubles begin in earnest. To the chagrin of her husband, the girl is the sole bread-winner until her Newark school hears of her marriage. Then, after having faced the hazards of some very trying friends, and having had the jam business they had hoped to get started knocked out from under them because of labor troubles, the young couple decide to go on with their jam-making in the country and start life anew.

Mr. Wilmurt tries hard to spice his romance with references to capital and labor no less than to budgets and to sex. Yet, for the most part, his drama proves to be more innocuous than arresting. It seldom overcomes the staidness of its theme, ultimately it turns out to be more regrettable than welcome.

Donald Oenslager has set it appropriately. Hugh Marlowe gives an extremely inarticulate performance as the harassed young husband. And the others in the cast at the Maxine Elliott no doubt try hard enough. But the effort somehow fails to seem worthwhile.



# "Young Couple Wanted"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, Jan. 25, 1940

## Arthur Wilmurt's 'Young Couple Wanted' Considers the Problem of Living in New York

By BROOKS ATKINSON

AS FAR as the theatre is concerned, this week has been set aside to consider the problem of young people trying to settle in New York. "Young Couple Wanted" Arthur Wilmurt calls his version of the problem. It was acted with considerable good will at Maxine Elliott's last evening. In comparison with Elmer Rice's polished cyclorama entitled "Two on an Island," Mr. Wilmurt's drama is less sure and expert, particularly in the staging. But Mr. Wilmurt writes about the impecunious and the educated as if he knew them, liked them and believed in their ability to solve their problems realistically. With one or two exceptions, the characters are real. The tone is gay. It is a young play in enthusiasm as well as theme, and it deserves a friendly reception in spite of gauderies in the writing and staging.

As a school teacher in Newark, sworn to monogamy for the first five years, she cannot marry the boy she loves, particularly since he can hardly support himself. But to comfort her parents, who are not yet reconciled to irregularities, they do marry and she loses her job. He cannot make a living selling matched toilet sets from door to door. Finally they try marketing home-made jam from the farm where

his brother lives, and they might have succeeded if labor troubles had not struck them at a crucial moment. New York licks them. But at the final curtain they are preparing to move back to the country and begin a business of home-made farm products to be marketed from there.

That is the core of the play, and perhaps it sounds forbidding. But Mr. Wilmurt has quite a handful of young friends to play with. All of them are good-natured, and at least one of them is by way of being a wit. Mr. Wilmurt

is writing at a rush, probably taking in too much territory for a small play and blandly closing his eyes to irreconcilable characters in his story. But most of his people are recognizable inhabitants of this great town, educated, ambitious, human, insecure and fine-spirited; and the harum-scarum life they lead close to the brink of privation is as familiar as it is comic. Being a comedy writer rather than a sociologist, Mr. Wilmurt has few complaints to make. He is chiefly interested in writing a lively drama.

If some of it is hard to believe, perhaps a good share of the blame will have to be placed on the drawing-board of Donald Oenslager, who designed the sets. Mr. Oenslager's notion of roughing it on an invisible budget includes smart furniture best suited to the sample rooms of interior decoration at New York department stores. Duse and Henry Irving would have difficulty in juring a wolf to their door if the interior were as cheerfully furnished as the Federal Housing Project where our starvelings are worrying.

Although Martin Gabel's actors are not Duses or Irvings yet, some of them may be better known in time. Like the play, they are young and attractive. Arlene Francis and Hugh Marlowe play the chief parts very pleasantly. Lloyd Gough makes something very amusing out of the insurgent wit. Helen Shields, Juliet Forbes and Richard Clark look after some of the other cases of youth in a hard city. John Adair and Zannah Cunningham represent the anxious parents from North Adams. In the direction Mr. Gabel has not entirely overcome a sense of embarrassment between the characters that reminds you that "Young Couple Wanted" is a play. But it is a fresh and likable comedy on the surface of a real idea, worth paying attention to on a street that prizes slickness too highly.

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, Jan. 25, 1940

## 'Young Couple Wanted,' a Minor Item, Is Offered at Maxine Elliott's

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

HALFWAY through the first act of "Young Couple Wanted," which opened last evening at Maxine Elliott's Theater, one becomes aware of a creeping sense of familiarity, as if all this had happened a good many times before. Arthur Wilmurt, the author, crams a good deal of plot into the ensuing two acts and involves his people in intricate misadventures, but even his best calculated surprises turn out to be precisely what you expected. The pleasures of playgoing are thus somewhat abated.

Mr. Wilmurt is writing, rather as Elmer Rice was a few evenings ago, of the difficulties of young people in New York as they seek adjustment between themselves and a place in the metropolis. Mr. Wilmurt gives them more problems than Mr. Rice ever thought of and considers them and their friends intently from many angles. He permits them to talk of the problem of marriage, always so awesome to characters in plays of this sort, and they give their views at length on the complexities of industry. They make amusing cracks now and then, and there is nothing much the matter with them except that they are not at all alive. Of the several ways in which Mr. Wilmurt differs from Mr. Rice as a dramatist, this is perhaps the most significant.

Mr. Wilmurt's young people enter marriage early, after the girl's mother discovers that they are living together without it. She loses her job as a teacher in Newark and he loses

his as a clerk in a store. Things get worse, and they build up a business selling jam made on the old farm—made, it is alarming to think, out of grapes and peanuts. Industrial strife ends that experiment and pretty soon they quit New York entirely as a bad job and go back to the farm, to make jam there.

There's no harm in any of this, or in Mr. Wilmurt's play, but not much good, either. It's just all very unimportant, and not very interesting. It is also only moderately well acted. Hugh Marlowe does an agreeable job as the young man and Arlene Francis is attractive enough as the girl. Juliet Forbes is pert and amusing as a young woman the young man finds on his doorstep one summer day. She's just a piece of plot Mr. Wilmurt left there, for no very good reason.

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# "Two On An Island"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, January 23, 1940

## Manhattan Idyll

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IN HIS new play Mr. Rice takes us on a pleasantly idyllic excursion through Manhattan's wonders, fleshpots and mantraps. With a humorous eye and a sympathetic heart, he shows us the joys and sorrows of existence along Broadway's bypaths from the Battery to the Bronx, telling us that young love can conquer and young ambition triumph despite the unthinking cruelty of the exciting city that is New York. Although he is bitter upon occasion and is realistic about his details, he is essentially in a romantic and optimistic mood, and, although his story has sadness in it it is essentially in the spirit of good-natured comedy. A casual, panoramic sort of play, wherein the only suspense lies in the question of whether the boy and the girl are ever going to meet and in which the all-important meeting actually doesn't take place until the beginning of the third act, this "Two on an Island" is filled with likeable and amusing episodes, and although it is not a drama of any great sturdiness or distinction, it does have an agreeable way about it.

New York, Mr. Rice is telling us, is just a great big village, and to emphasize that entertaining point he has the minor characters running into each other in scene after scene, whether it be the subway, a cheap restaurant, the front of a night club, the Metropolitan Museum or the Statue of Liberty. For hero and heroine, however, the matter is not so easily arranged. Somehow they miss each other all over Manhattan until finally, just as some of the more impatient members of the audience are beginning to worry, they run into each other up in the head of the Statue of Liberty. A disillusioned theatrical producer, if that is not a redundancy, acts as a sort of mild and amiable menace to both the meeting and the lovemaking of hero and heroine, and, in addition to seeming at times a trifle like Mr. Jed Harris with a kind heart, he serves both as the most amusing character in the play and Mr. Rice's symbol of Manhattan's bitterness. In the end it is he who helps the boy and girl to solve their problems and provides the final evidence that the author thinks New York is all right at bottom.

There are moments when Mr. Rice's well known social conscience makes its appearance, but even here he is in a semi-humorous

mood, and, in the end, when his young Harvard Communist marries a society glamour girl and tries to teach her about the C.I.O. he even laughs out loud a bit. The episodes that make up "Two on an Island" are of varying merit, with the casual scenes of the first act and the Statue of Liberty love scene in the last section proving to be the most enlightening of the lot. The arrival of the boy and girl in the city and a ride about the island in a sightseeing bus offer episodes that are particularly attractive, and throughout the work shrewd bits of characterization, keen bits of observation and moments of genuine fun make for effective entertainment. The final effect is of a series of pleasantly managed panoramic glimpses into the curious existence of a curious and fascinating island, rather than a fully satisfying play, but, for most of the time, this tour of our city has a refreshing quality about it.

As in the case of all the presentations of the Playwrights' Company, the production is an excellent one. Jo Mielziner's imaginatively economical settings are of great help, and the playing is invariably good. Miss Betty Field, who is rapidly making an enviable place for herself in the local theater, is particularly fine as the girl, playing her role with sympathy, humor and directness. John Craven is excellent as the young man, and Luther Adler, perfectly suited to the role of the sardonic producer, adds a biting kind of vitality to the work that is of great importance to it. A number of players appear to advantage in the minor parts, and a quick glance through the

### "TWO ON AN ISLAND"

A play in three acts by Elmer Rice; staged by the author; designed and lighted by Jo Mielziner; costumes by Helene Pons; presented at the Broadhurst Theater on January 22, 1940, by the Playwrights Company. The cast:

|                            |                 |
|----------------------------|-----------------|
| William Flynn.....         | Robert Williams |
| Samuel Brodsky.....        | Martin Ritt     |
| A Red-Cap.....             | Earl Sydnor     |
| Mary Ward.....             | Betty Field     |
| John Thompson.....         | John Craven     |
| A Policeman.....           | Edward Downes   |
| Clifton Ross.....          | Earl McDonald   |
| The Sightseeing Guide..... | Howard daSilva  |
| The Driver.....            | Robert O'Brien  |
| Mrs. Dora Levy.....        | Dora Weisman    |
| Dixie Bushby.....          | Arthur L. Sachs |
| A Middle-Western Man.....  | Roderick Mayhew |

|                                |                   |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| A Middle-Western Woman.....    | Roberta Bellinger |
| Frederic Winthrop.....         | Whitner Bissell   |
| Lawrence Ormont.....           | Luther Adler      |
| Martha Johnson.....            | Terry Harris      |
| An Actor.....                  | Charles Polacheck |
| Helma Kalitark.....            | Rudolf Weiss      |
| Dorothy Clark.....             | Martha Hodge      |
| Katherine Winthrop Holmes..... |                   |

|                             |                   |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| Martin Blake.....           | Herchel Bentley   |
| A Cashier.....              | Norma Green       |
| Gracie Mullen.....          | Ann Thomas        |
| A Married Couple.....       | Sarah Peyton      |
|                             | John Phillips     |
| Helen Ormont.....           | Harriet MacGibbon |
| Sonia Taranova.....         | Eva Langford      |
| Mrs. Hallinger.....         | Frederica Going   |
| A Museum Attendant.....     | Charles La Torre  |
| Another Married Couple..... | Dorothy Darling   |
|                             | John Triggs       |
| Ruth Ormont.....            | Helen Renee       |
| A Hindu.....                | Laurel Layton     |
| A Walter.....               | Angie Steenshorne |
| Another Married Couple..... | Selwyn Myers      |
| Fred.....                   | Lucille Sears     |
| Dolly.....                  | Bon Shelton       |
| Mrs. Williams.....          | Adela Longmire    |
|                             | Mary Michael      |

program recalls the good work of Robert Williams and Martin Ritt as taxi drivers, Earl McDonald as a lame artist, Howard daSilva as a sightseeing guide, Miss Dora Weisman as an unwanted Jewish mother and little Miss Helen Renee as the producer's lonely child. Miss Adela Longmire, whose Ann Rutledge in "Abe Lincoln in Illinois" still is happily remembered, is seen but momentarily. "Two on an Island" shows its author in his mellowest mood.

It is perhaps because Mr. Rice takes this more tolerant view of life, that "Two On an Island" provides a mellow evening in the theater. It is not profound, to be sure, and only on rare occasions is any arresting philosophy expounded. Those who go to the theater to be "disturbed" or aroused or electrified (or who expect to find their opinions on the class war confirmed) will be disappointed in it.

The adventures of the boy and girl in New York are, I suppose, very real and very typical. Each of them has his temporary and minor successes, and each has his periods of discouragement and hopelessness. There are moments of physical hunger which are even more disconcerting than those of spiritual hunger. Each episode leaves them a little wiser, a little firmer in their convictions, a little better equipped to fight the city and a little harder boiled.

They do not meet each other until the final act, when the need for mutual support and encouragement becomes dire and when they discover, in the words of one of the characters, that "it is easier for two to be hard boiled than one."

That is all there is to the play, but it is written with good humor and considerable charm and it is delightfully played.

Luther Adler, in the role of the theatrical producer, plays with his customary sureness in a role well suited to his capacity for portraying the worldly-wise and cynical. Miss Betty Field was never better, and her transition from the glowing country girl who arrives starry-eyed at the brave new world, into the sadder and wiser but still courageous young woman, is accomplished with marvelous ease. Of our younger actresses, I don't know one who has made greater progress in recent years. John Craven, too, shows decided improvement, and adds to his acting stature as the boy who meets the girl.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, January 23, 1940

## Two on an Island A Pleasant Comedy

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

TWO ON AN ISLAND, the new play by Elmer Rice, is a pleasant and unpretentious comedy of metropolitan life, ingeniously constructed and happily without an overburden of ponderous sociology. It seems to have been built for New Yorkers, but I have an idea it will fascinate, to an even greater degree, those of our country cousins to whom New York represents the goal of ambition and the fulfillment of all dreams.

One of the elements very much in its favor is its simplicity. Against it is the inescapable fact that its pace is deliberate, that some of its characters are overdrawn and become caricatures, and that there are too many words and too little action in the first and last scenes.

The new production, however, for all its faults is a decided addition to the healthy list of successes which, this season, play so heavily upon the American scene for their popular appeal, and it is helped immeasurably by the high quality of acting provided for it by the Playwrights Company which presented it last night at the Broadhurst Theater.

Reduced to its simplest terms, this is a play about a boy and girl who come to New York to make their fortunes, who become discouraged and disillusioned—well, almost disillusioned—by what they find here, and who finish bravely by still believing that New York is an all-right city.

Perhaps Mr. Rice will be accused of contributing to the escapist drama because of this pleasant little comedy. Certainly he is not using his stage for a soap-box on this occasion, and even when he lampoons such figures as the idle rich, the pseudo-socialists, the commercial and greedy theatrical producers, or even the stupid nonentities who form such a large portion of the city's underground population, he retains a sense of humor and declines the invitation to become bitter about them.

# "Two On An Island"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, January 23, 1940

## Elmer Rice's New Play, "Two on an Island"

The Playwrights Present It With Betty Field, John Craven, and Luther Adler

By JOHN MASON BROWN

TO INSIST that, in the most literal sense of the word, "Two on an Island" is a *tour de force* is to do it no injustice. If Elmer Rice's new play must be described as being more of a bus-ride than a drama, this is no doubt precisely what he meant it to be. It finds him serving, not as the author of "Street Scene" but as a guide on a rubber-neck tour of Manhattan.

That Mr. Rice turns out to be a fairly entertaining guide, with several excellent spiels upon his megaphone, must be as quickly admitted as if the fact that the trip on which he takes us is for the most part a diverting one. Yet as he heads East

Side, West Side, all-around the town, allowing us to see New York in terms of the struggles and the courage of a stage-struck boy and girl who have come to make their fortunes here, it must also be at once confessed that Mr. Rice, the director, plays a far more important and helpful part in the evening's proceedings than does Mr. Rice, the Dramatist.

Mr. Rice, the playwright, does turn out some adroit scenes from time to time. He has an admirable ear for dramatic speech. He can look into character when he wants to. He knows his way around both New York and the theatre. Yet perhaps it is not to be wondered at that his play—as a play—is to a large extent swallowed up by the Manhattan which is its central figure. This time Mr. Rice is in an amiable mood. Although he does not forget the city's sickening shadows, he lets a spotlight, either comic or satiric, play upon most of the glooms in his pageant. Entertainment is his aim—the kind of entertainment and wonder even a native-born New Yorker must derive from a trip around the island. And this he does provide by fair means or by foul.

### The Perils of Manhattan

Mr. Rice does not hesitate to take us on a super-sentimental journey. He does not seem to have any weightier utterance on his mind than the fairly common cry of "How I hate New York, but, God, how I love it!" He knows it takes luck and toughness to succeed east of the Hudson, and is not ashamed to say so for eleven scenes. Yet like many another he loves the city. He sings a hymn to Broadway and Katharine Cornell, to the theatre, and the art museums at the same time he is pointing out, in what are essentially good old "pulp" terms, the heartbreaks that lie behind the dauntless skyline. As he shifts his scenes from taxicabs at the station to a sight-seeing bus, Broadway, a subway, Greenwich Village, the Metropolitan Art Museum, the exterior of a night club, and Chelsea, he does not even hesitate to have his young playwright and young actress meet at overlong last in the head of the Statue of Liberty and fall in love there!

"Two on an Island" is that kind of play.

It is, too, the kind of play which finds Mr. Rice bringing his skill and his insight to a writing form which is so easy that often it seems almost automatic. It is also the sort of play that not only turns a whole metropolis into something more neighborly than a block party but that actually breaks the long term of coincidence by insisting upon having one small group of characters meet and re-meet on Manhattan until you almost suspect them all to have been born in a litter of Siamese twins.

### An Admirable Production

Even so "Two on an Island" holds the interest, especially in its first and last acts. It does so because the intermittent skill of its writing is outdistanced at all times by the consistent and very genuine skill of its direction, its acting, and its backgrounds. Mr. Rice has never coordinated a smoother-running performance or met a difficult assignment in staging in a more masterly manner. The job he has done on the production is truly a heroic one. So, for that matter, is Mr. Meisler's. In terms of shadowy projections of the skyline and admirable skeletonized indications of locale (which Sidney Kingsley might well study), Mr. Meisler has caught the feeling and contours of the city in arresting and highly imaginative terms. No scenery of the winter has been more inventive or performed a more quickening and evocative service.

Mr. Rice has been no less fortunate in his players than in his designer. As "The Wolf of Broadway," a manager who attempts to take advantage of an innocent young actress, Luther Adler is excellent. He endows many of Mr. Rice's best lines with their full cynical force; and captures completely the disillusionment, the bitterness, and the brooding power of the man.

John Craven, as the young playwright from the Middle West, is as sensitive and effective as he was as the boy in "Our Town." And Betty Field, as the stage-struck New Englander, proves herself once again to be one of the most interesting and talented of our younger actresses. She has poise, beauty, character, and skill. Always gifted and ingratiating, she has from play to play developed. Now, over night she occupies a new and highly promising position in our theatre.

From the huge and capable cast at the Broadhurst, some grateful mention must also be made of Dora Weissman's clearly etched and moving Mrs. Levy; of Howard da Silva's leather-lunged sightseeing guide, and of Martha Hodge's silly rich girl. The Playwrights Company can, in short, be proud of the production it has given "Two on an Island." The only pity is that in his new comedy Mr. Rice has so busied himself taking us on an amusing bus-ride that he has failed to get around to writing the whole play his better scenes promise.

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, January 23, 1940

## Elmer Rice's "Two on an Island" Opens at the Broadhurst Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

ELMER RICE tells a story of young love in Manhattan in "Two on an Island," which opened at the Broadhurst last evening, and he tells it with essential simplicity and tenderness. As a background for his story, using many scenes and an army of actors, he sketches a picture of the city which, in detail, is always pungent and characteristic. "Two on an Island" had, indeed, everything except body; it is an immensely skillful compilation of irrelevancies.

It is difficult to tell what produces this effect. Essentially, the story of the boy and girl who come to New York on the same day to crack its riveted shell is as valid as it is touching. The girl wants to act, the boy to write plays. They take taxicabs which stand together in the rank, and afterward for two years their paths cross but their lives do not touch. They are seats apart on a sight-seeing bus. They go the same day to a suave, wet-soaked producer. When he is a counter man he serves her coffee and corn flakes. She

is posing in an artist's studio when he appears to sell an art book. He is panhandling in front of a bar when she comes out, and yet always their lives are drifting closer together; always the audience knows that they will meet.

I suppose the fragility and inconclusiveness of the play results from the thinness of this

thread of suspense. You wait for them to sort themselves out of this city against the imperviousness of which they are chipping—out of the subways and buses and streets and buildings of Jo Meisler's brilliantly sketchy sets, out of the swarming bystanders Mr. Rice creates with that infallible, witty touch of his. And this waiting isn't quite enough. The boy and girl become, like the others, people met in a crowd.

When they finally meet—in the head of the Statue of Liberty, incidentally—their love affair is touching and real. Then Mr. Rice's story takes on feeling, and a kind of under-emphasized gallantry. Then the drama finally focuses on these two of the thousands who come every year to New York, trying to chip their way in, and the audience is given the emotional contact point so long missing. But more than two-thirds of the play has scattered itself in incidents before that, and two-thirds is a lot of any man's play. I am afraid that it is too much of "Two on an Island"; too much even for a Rice tour of city types, in spite of the continuous delights which such a tour affords.

All those types and the central characters themselves are beautifully acted. Betty Field's playing of the girl has freshness and a kind of wise innocence; John Craven captures the boy's callowness and uncertainty and courage. Luther Adler plays the producer with the subtlety of modulation, and Dora Weissman, Martin Ritt, Howard da Silva, Terry Harris, Martha Hodge and Ann Thomas are notably expert in a generally expert cast. Mr. Rice is expert, too, but his expertness this time doesn't seem to be quite enough.



# "Two On An Island"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, January 23, 1940

## "Two on an Island," Little Old Story of Little Old New York

"Two on an island," comedy by Elmer Rice. Produced by the Playwrights' Company at the Broadhurst Theatre, New York, Jan. 22, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THERE is nothing obscure or deceptive about Elmer Rice's treatment of his newest comedy, which is "Two on an Island," arriving at the Broadhurst Theatre last night. He is retelling the little old story of Little Old New York in a new setting by Jo Mielziner and with a couple of actors new to the Playwrights' Company.

He brings it in a couple of skeletonized taxi cabs, and carries it on in a skeletonized sight-seeing bus. And it starts pretty slowly for that reason. Not because of the traffic jams, goodness knows. But because Mr. Rice is eager to make the tale complete and true to both tradition and the theatre.

Thus we have pretty Mary Ward from New Hampshire and John Thompson from Iowa arriving on the same day to conquer the same big city. And thereafter we have Mary and John mildly tempted and mildly menaced and mildly miserable and mildly successful, with no more than a dash of social significance and hardly any plot at all.

### Old Hat, New Trimming

There is, as you experienced dramagoers very well know, only two things that can give life and entertainment value to such a tale—the human appeal of its characters and the personal appeal of the actors who play them.

Mr. Rice, being a showman of experience and perception, has been careful about the selection of both types and players. Betty Field is the perfect innocent from New Hampshire, and John Craven stands solidly for the rugged but not unassailable virtues of the great Middle West.

These two dart in and out of eleven scenes, taking them through Broadway, the subway, the Village, the Museum, into Joe's Coffee Pot, into a Chelsea furnished room and even through the royal diadem of Lady Liberty herself. Yet they never meet until near the play's end.

He has his trouble finding a job. She has her trouble preserving her good name. He

wants to write and has to compromise with a variety of jobs. She wants to act, but fills in with modeling and clerking. The formula, as you may see, is about as common as your old hat.

But there is a measure of freshness in the treatment and in the Mielziner economy sets. And there is a nice quality of characterization in the playing.

I suppose Mr. Rice argues that every person's life is drama and that if you piece enough little dramas together you have a show. It doesn't always work out. There are stretches of "Two on an Island" that seem pretty sluggish and trivial, not to say trite, in sustaining quality.

### Actors Help

The eleven scenes add up, however, to a pleasant if not a rewarding evening in the theatre. And it is worth something to watch Miss Field pose the charm of the town's most effective ingénue in a way she was taught to do by George Abbott, and has been helped in the doing by Mr. Rice. Miss Field exudes charm and a guileless type of New England sophistication, and makes the evening back stage pretty much her own.

Luther Adler lends personal force to the cynicism of a wordy producer. Mr. Craven is soundly simple. Earl McDonald was modestly authoritative as a hopeful but decently minded artist. There are short parts admirably realized by Martha Hodge, Harriet McGibbon, Martin Ritt, Dora Weissman and several others.

If it can hurdle the Broadway wisecrackers there is a fine chance for "Two on an Island." And an even better chance once it goes touring, providing the pictures haven't robbed the old boy-meets-girl-in-the-big-city theme of all its appeal.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, January 23, 1940

## Elmer Rice's "Two On An Island" Is a Fable of Young People in Manhattan

By BROOKS ATKINSON

BEING in a mellow mood for the moment, Elmer Rice has written a pleasant fable about life in Manhattan. "Two On An Island" is what he calls it. The Playwrights' Company put it on at the Broadhurst last evening. Taking an attractive girl from New England and a likely lad from the Middle West, Mr. Rice conducts them on a personal tour of the gilt and grubbiness of Cosmopolis. As his own director, Mr. Rice has had the good taste to cast Betty Field and John Craven as his immigrants, and Jo Mielziner has caught Manhattan angles beautifully in a skillful production. After acknowledging the random beguilements of a play that is written with humor and kindness, may this

column suggest that the point of view is skin-deep and the pace is ambling? At his best Mr. Rice can plunge furiously into a subject. His Manhattan idyll seems tepid in comparison with "Street Scene," which represented his convictions.

Although it is an old story it is always charming, especially for the middle-aged who can recall parts of it in tranquillity. The girl from New Hampshire wants to be an actress. The boy from Iowa is already an unproduced playwright. Mr. Rice introduces them separately to the overwhelming wonders of the

town and for two acts conducts them separately through the heartbreaks of job-hunting and failure. At the moment when the boy has about surrendered they meet in the head of the Statue of Liberty. Let us leave the rest of the story to theatregoers who do not insist on knowing everything before the see a play.

Not that Mr. Rice has confined "Two On An Island" to his apprentices. Having an affection for that bizarre array of life that Manhattan represents, he touches in passing on a lot of it—the omniscient taxmen, who are the oracles of our town; a cynical producer who

has sold out to success; an illustrator who is ambitious; the wealthy crusader for Left Wing causes; the coffee-pot forum, the subway, the lodging house. Among other gifts, Mr. Rice can write with humor, and "Two On An Island" is frequently amusing with lines—that lie half way between satire and sympathy. Without being a wisecracker Mr. Rice can write with comic flavor.

Something very thankful should be said for the modest sunniness of Betty Field's personality and for the grace of her acting. She gives the whole play a captivating radiance. Although John Craven has not been playing major roles long, he can act them like a thoroughbred and help make the theatre an attractive place whenever he is in it. Luther Adler, a temporary fugitive from the Group Theatre, acts the part of a case-hardened producer with bitter accuracy of character statement. The cast is a long one, crowded with types, but Mr. Rice has picked the more important ones out of obscurity by letting Howard daSilva, Martin Ritt, Dora Weissman, Martha Hodge and Ann Thomas play them.

Obviously there are many things in "Two On An Island" to recommend it for an evening of casual theatregoing. It may be ungrateful to add that it leaves one theatregoer vaguely disappointed. For Mr. Rice is usually the man to drive boldly at the roots of the things he is discussing and, right or wrong, express an opinion. The benevolent mood and the sketchy style of "Two On An Island" are more soothing than exhilarating. Under the sleek facade of Manhattan there is a fire that keeps everybody moving. And under the fairy-story surface of "Two On An Island" there is a burning drama that Mr. Rice has not attempted to put on the stage.

# "The Man Who Killed Lincoln"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, January 18, 1940

## Story of 'The Man Who Killed Lincoln' From a Novel by Phillip Van Doren Stern

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IN THE program of "The Man Who Killed Lincoln," which was acted at the Longacre last evening, the authors declare "we have tried to be as impartial as we could, permitting John Wilkes Booth to speak many of the actual words he used in justification of his act. We have tried to explain him. We have studied him with neither rancor nor affection, and we have tried to present him simply as a human being, with all a human being's thoughts and feelings." Although Booth is doubtless a distasteful subject, whether we realize it or not, it is easy to see that Elmer Harris and Phillip Van Doren Stern have lived up to the spirit of their preamble.

But it is hard to overlook the fact that, with the exception of one scene, they have written a pedestrian drama that is badly acted, especially in the leading role.

The exception is the brief scene at the home of Samuel Cox, with Whitford Kane acting the part. For here the authors have put aside their neutral point of view and, doubtless

with historical authority, permitted a man of intellectual superiority to speak his mind freely about not only murder but the political blunder of assassinating the leader of a victorious army. Samuel Cox is shrewd enough to perceive that the murder of Lincoln will let loose a scourge of vengeance on the innocent and defenseless people of the South. The scene is well written and obviously sympathetic for

most of us; and Whitford Kane acts it with directness and passion. Nothing in the rest of "The Man Who Killed Lincoln" comes up to this vigorous expression of opinion, which can be acted and is acted extremely well.

Using Mr. Stern's novel as the chief source book, Mr. Harris and Mr. Stern have otherwise set down the narrative of a hysterical, overwrought actor who conceives in theatrical style the murder of the man who symbolizes the destruction of the South. Once Lincoln, Seward, Grant and Johnson are out of the way, Booth believes that the Southern Army will rise again and turn defeat into victory. The drama shows the murder of Lincoln and chronicles Booth's attempt to escape and his final capture in a tobacco shed. By this time he has begun to realize that his rash murder has removed a man whom millions revere; and that what he conceived as a brilliant deed is really a tragic and ghastly blunder.

If the authors are not to take sides about the significance of Lincoln's murder, their play can be little more than a sensational crime story, quite apart from the people involved. But that is less important in the theatre than the fact that the play is badly acted. Richard Waring's acting of Booth is completely lacking in authority. Sam Byrd's Davy Herold, Booth's chief retainer, is trivial. Excepting Whitford Kane's, the acting is generally undistinguished, and the settings by Eugene Dunkel are mediocre also. The murder of Lincoln is a subject that requires superior writing and acting. Although Booth may have been only an unbalanced man, his crime was no common murder and cannot be dramatically treated now as a regrettable aberration.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, January 18, 1940

## "The Man Who Killed Lincoln" Is Acted

Richard Waring, Sam Byrd, and Whitford Kane Seen in an  
Historical Drama

By JOHN MASON BROWN

INASMUCH as most Americans know nearly everything about John Wilkes Booth which "The Man Who Killed Lincoln" has to tell them, Elmer Harris' and Phillip Van Doren Stern's new play at the Longacre can hardly be accused of possessing suspense.

In nine sleepy scenes, acted with little or no distinction and directed even more feebly than they are written, it crawls through the story of the conspiracy and the tragic night at Ford's Theatre until it reaches (with no effectiveness) its inevitable end when the Garrett tobacco barn is burned and Booth shot.

The pity is that, though its authors insist they are being impartial, "The Man Who Killed Lincoln" is a drama which subtracts from rather than adds to the unfortunate story it is telling. It does not succeed in explaining Booth save in the most elementary terms of a deluded rancor of such mediocrity that even the Crummies family would have banished him from its midst.

### Booth Assassinated

Certainly it does not manage to make him a human being "with all a human being's thoughts and feelings" (as the program puts it). Rather it reduces Booth to the status of a man who was even worse as an actor than he was misguised as a conspirator. Had the real Booth been given to such attitudinizing, cape-swingings, leg-twirlings, lock-pullings, eye-rollings, and space-clutchings he would no

doubt have been mercifully barred admittance to Ford's Theatre.

If Richard Waring indulges in all these grease-paint luxuries, he is not to be blamed too severely. With such direction and in such a play, there is probably little else left for him to do. His only sin is that of meeting the writing on its own terms.

For one episode, as a Southerner Irish enough to be Scarlett O'Hara's father, Whitford Kane brings at least a certain fire to some unfortunate speeches that editorialize all those facts the half-crazed and vain Booth would have done well to think of beforehand.

But the evening for the most part is a sorry one in the fullest sense of the word. By this I mean that, in addition to self-pity, one sits, through the three acts at the Longacre being sorry for Mr. Waring, Mr. Kane, Sam Byrd, yes, and even for the real John Wilkes Booth.

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# "The Man Who Killed Lincoln"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, January 18, 1940

## 'Man Who Killed Lincoln' Misses The Drama of John Wilkes Booth

"The Man Who Killed Lincoln," play by Elmer Harris and Philip Van Doren Stern, presented by Joseph M. Gaites at the Longacre Theatre, New York, Jan. 17, 1940.

★ ★

By JOHN CHAPMAN

**A** PLAY about John Wilkes Booth opened last night at the Longacre Theatre, so now there are two plays about "The Man Who." It is this journalist's job to report that "The Man Who Came to Dinner" is a more interesting assassin than "The Man Who Killed Lincoln."

Last night's drama derives from a book about Booth by Philip Van Doren Stern. The mechanics of transferring the tragedy from page to stage is well handled, with nine episodes covering the story from Booth's conception of the murder to his death in the Garrett barn. But the more important task of making the first Public Enemy No. 1 come alive has been less successful.

### Book Pages Cling

Part of this lack of achievement must be that Mr. Stern and his collaborator, Elmer Harris, have not always managed to transform reading-matter into talking-matter. Pages of print get in the way. John Wilkes Booth was an actor and perhaps a ham actor—but even a ham, delicious from an injured leg, would not have soliloquized as does Richard Waring on the bank of the Longacre's Rappahannock River.

In the early scenes Mr. Waring looks and behaves much as the real Booth must have: pallid, intense, he is a man who is winding himself up to commit a mad and daring deed. But later, when he is hiding from his pursuers, he puts on both makeup and acting too thick. On his pallet on the river bank he looks a little like Boris Karloff doing "Tristan."

### The Shooting Box

The play begins three days before the shooting, with Booth deciding to free the

South, or at least give it a chance to fight again, by removing the tyrant he hates. The plot is completed in a Washington saloon and in Booth's hotel room. Then there is the scene in the President's box at Ford's Theatre—with Charles Keane looking enough like Lincoln to get shot. Five more episodes show various stages of Booth's painful flight—and in one of these, in which the assassin seeks help from Samuel Cox, Whitford Kane makes a character really live.

The cast is large and carefully costumed. Sam Byrd snivels manfully as Davy Herold, the boy who sticks by his "Mr. Booth" to the end. John Morny makes a picturesque plotter, Lewis Paine, and Martin Blaine has an effective bit as John Surratt. Eugene Dunkel's acts are good, though modestly budgeted, and highly workable.

With this production Joseph M. Gaites returns to the Broadway managerial ranks. It is too bad that his offspring, which is an honest and respectable search for the innate drama of Booth's career, falls a little short of its mission.

### "THE MAN WHO KILLED LINCOLN"

A play in three acts, by Elmer Harris and Philip Van Doren Stern, dramatized from Mr. Stern's book of the same title; staged by Felix Brentano, settings by Eugene Dunkel; presented at the Longacre Theatre on January 17, 1940; by Joseph M. Gaites. The cast:

|                              |                    |
|------------------------------|--------------------|
| John Wilkes Booth.....       | Richard Waring     |
| Lewis Paine.....             | John Morny         |
| First Soldier.....           | Pendleton Harrison |
| Second Soldier.....          | Clancy Cooper      |
| Officer.....                 | Howard Ferguson    |
| Deery.....                   | John L. Kearney    |
| M. Nogaret.....              | Robert de Lany     |
| Senator Talbot.....          | Joseph Kramm       |
| First Congressman.....       | Robert Pitkin      |
| Second Congressman.....      | Willard Foster     |
| Henry Davis Somers.....      | William Jeffery    |
| A. Walter.....               | Horace McNally     |
| Davy Herold.....             | Sam Byrd           |
| George Atzerodt.....         | Paul Varro         |
| John Surratt.....            | Martin Blaine      |
| President Lincoln.....       | Charles Keane      |
| Charles Keane.....           | Mary Dorne         |
| Mary Dorne.....              | Major Rathbone     |
| Miss Clara Harris.....       | Gloria Washburn    |
| Parker.....                  | Robert Reamer      |
| Lloyd.....                   | Frank McCormack    |
| Samuel Cox.....              | Whitford Kane      |
| Henry.....                   | Billy Demott       |
| Thomas Jones.....            | Edwin Vall         |
| Col. Lafayette C. Baker..... | Robert Pitkin      |
| Lieut. Baker.....            | Howard Ferguson    |
| Col. Conner.....             | William Hitch      |
| Willie Jett.....             | Eugene Francis     |
| Garrett.....                 | Willard Foster     |
| Mrs. Garrett.....            | Mary Dorne         |
| Lieut. Doherty.....          | Laurence Weber Jr. |
| Bill Garrett.....            | Henry Hull Jr.     |
| Sergt. Boston Corbett.....   | Pendleton Harrison |

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, January 18, 1940

## The Man Who Killed Lincoln A Psychological Study

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

**I**T IS a strange thing that while a bare, factual recital of the incidents surrounding the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, together with a sober description of the personalities involved in the plot through which it was encompassed, contains every element of drama, it is nevertheless possible to place these facts on a stage and in the translation of them discover that nearly all the drama has vanished.

I believe that Elmer Harris and Philip Van Doren Stern, who dramatized Mr. Stern's book under the title of *The Man Who Killed Lincoln*, labored diligently and sincerely to explain to the public the distorted mentality of John Wilkes Booth. Their descriptions of the various characters who lent themselves to the monstrous plot may be accurate. But they have not written a good drama.

The bombast and theatrics that were Booth's stock in trade in the theater are, for one thing, so artificial that any sense of reality or of historical truth is lost the moment they are shown to us on a modern stage. The resounding phrases, the heroics, the maudlin patriotism, the apostrophes to God, the asides and soliloquies, are all so preposterous and unbelievable, so foreign to actuality, that all the sincerity with which

the Messrs. Harris and Stern started their play is knocked on the head the moment Richard Waring, in the role of the assassin, opens his mouth in the first scene.

The *Man Who Killed Lincoln* sounds, in fact, as though it were written by Dion Boucicault after the fashion of *Belle Lamar* (which you should read some time just for the hell of it) and it belongs in a school of playwriting that is useful today only in burlesquing the dear, dead past.

The pretense is made that we are to have an explanation of Booth's mentality and his self-justification for the frightful deed. In the new play, which opened last night at the Longacre Theatre, I am sorry not to find the

slightest trace of this explanation. I do not know today whether Booth was a madman, or if he was what drove him to his fanaticism. I am convinced, perhaps, that Booth thought he was helping the lost cause of the South—and yet I am not so sure, for it might even be that he was merely trying to immortalize the name of Booth, and adopted this costly process of self-aggrandizement.

None of these characters, from the leader down through Lewis Paine, George Atzerodt, John Surratt and Davy Herold, whether they happened to be guilty partners in the conspiracy or innocent victims of it, seems to stand out clearly, and that is partly the fault of the writing and partly that of poor direction and wretched acting.

I have already spoken of Mr. Waring's bombastic Booth, which gave the play a stilted quality from beginning to end, and which was totally ineffective in arousing pity, compassion, hatred or sympathy to say in view of some of the lines he was required to speak mirth.

By contrast, there was one brief moment when reality descended upon the play-acting, and that was in the third scene of the second act, when Whitford Kane was permitted to make a resounding speech. The incident provided a striking illustration of what good acting can do to a bad play, but it also emphasized the ineptitude of a majority of the other actors.

It was a sorrowful thing to see Sam Byrd struggling with all his might against the insuperable odds of a childish role, but it was more painful to witness John Morny bring to bear all the stereotyped style of acting that he has absorbed from the directorial genius of Hollywood melodrama.

In stating that *The Man Who Killed Lincoln* is no fit sequel to *Abe Lincoln of Illinois* I am guilty of the grossest understatement.



# "The Man Who Killed Lincoln"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, January 18, 1940

## Portrait of an Actor

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THE painful story of John Wilkes Booth supplies far from ideal material for play writing. Although there is something inescapably fascinating about the character of the mentally twisted actor who killed the greatest of American heroes, it is the fascination of psychopathic probing into a disordered mind, and not that inherent in a straightforward drama of narrative. That is the chief trouble with the well meant dramatization called "The Man Who Killed Lincoln." Its investigations into the black depths of its central character's tortured spirit are fairly superficial, and the play attempts rather to present the outward picture of the melodramatic episodes that led the neurotic egocentric actor with the longing to be a new Brutus, to the crime in the Washington theater box and then took him to his miserable death as a hated fugitive in a Virginia barn. As narrative the play suffers from the fact that from the death of Lincoln the tale becomes hopelessly anti-climactic on a rapidly descending scale. As a sort of soul portrait of a self-deluded madman it is lacking in depth.

The portrait of Booth, despite the fact that it never goes very deep, is a convincing one. As the authors say in a foreword to their drama, "We have studied him with neither rancor nor affection and have tried to present him simply as a human being, with all a human being's thoughts and feelings." Passing over the question of a playwright's ability to be truly impressive emotionally about a character he neither hates nor is fond of, it can be said that there is credibility in this conception of the assassin as a vain, essentially weak man, with a great longing for glory, who really believed he would be looked upon as a hero and was utterly bewildered when he discovered that he was regarded with loathing. The tragedy of Booth, as the dramatists see it, came when he saw that the Confederate farmer to whom he went for aid looked upon

him as a murderer rather than a hero. After that the pursuit and the death of the fugitive become unimportant. Dramatically, the trouble is that three more scenes are necessary to carry the story to its conclusion, and they add nothing to the tragedy.

The first act of the new play is decidedly the most interesting, since the account of the actor's hatred for Lincoln and of the planning of the conspiracy is managed with a certain amount of dramatic effectiveness. It is the drama's ill fate that, after that, only the aforementioned incident of Booth's discovery that the nation hated, rather than loved him is of any true interest. The scene of the killing in Ford's Theater is so clumsily staged that it almost completely destroys the work's illusion, while the episodes of the flight across the Potomac are merely repetitions of things the dramatists have already told us. There are, however, some effective performances, particularly by Sam Byrd, as the assassin's faithful friend, and by John Morny, as the most unruffled of the conspirators. Richard Waring in the title role is, I think, very much like the play in which he is appearing. He is persuasive, but superficial in his portrait. "The Man Who Killed Lincoln" must in the end be set down as a failure.

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, January 18, 1940

## "The Man Who Killed Lincoln" Opens at the Longacre Theatre

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THE theater plunged rather awkwardly into history last evening at the Longacre, coming up with several familiar facts and a number of longish speeches about John Wilkes Booth, "The Man Who Killed Lincoln." The play which bears that title has been extracted by Elmer Harris and Philip Van Doren Stern from Mr. Stern's lively book, which went by the same name. The authors seek to explain Booth, as a good many have before them.

"We have studied him with neither rancor nor affection," they insist in a prefatory note. "We have tried to present him simply as a human being, with all a human

being's thoughts and feelings." The intention, if a little tautologous, is understandable—is, possibly, the best reason for attempting to capture for the stage the drama of Booth's "mad act" and the drab melodrama of his flight and death. With their goal always just beyond reach, the authors have striven earnestly. But Booth remains elusive.

On the stage he strutted like the showy, bombastic actor he was on the stage of the 1860s. He is handsome and full of wordy explanations and tormented with the probably correct suspicion that he is mad. But he is all surface, and rather obvious surface. The authors show him preparing assassination, killing Lincoln, fleeing with a broken leg. And they let him talk. But the reality of Wilkes Booth, the "human being's thoughts and feelings" he had as he fled from the cavalry troops into a South which turned against him, remains to be disclosed by more penetrating writers than Mr. Harris and Mr. Stern.

And with nothing coming of the character, not much comes of the play. The melodrama is cramped in tight, and once or twice very odd looking sets. The excitement of the murder scene is frittered away by uncertain direction. Now and then a scene takes on life, as does that of Booth's rebuttal by Samuel Cox, but then it is an actor—Whitford Kane—throwing off the fustian covers under his own power. The rest is melodrama, chiefly thunder, with little blood.

Richard Waring is handsome and Wilkes Boothian in the title role, but lacks the inner force which might have made the part cohere. Sam Byrd gives a quiet, rather touching performance as Davy Herold, the little clerk who supported Booth in his flight. Mr. Kane brings kicking reality to the costumed scene. But some of the acting is in the style of the period, full of strutting and posture, and the drama is pretty hollow.

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# "Juno and the Paycock"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, January 17, 1940

## Sean O'Casey's 'Juno and the Paycock' Is Revived at the Mansfield

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

**J**UNO AND THE PAYCOCK," Sean O'Casey's bitter tonic play of Irish tenement life, was revived last evening at the Mansfield. Barry Fitzgerald fills the stage with the part of that shiftless, swaggering "Paycock" who is the butt of the author's angry jest and Sara Allgood is his Juno, substantial and full of vigor in the play's rather unnerving advance from almost conventional Irish comedy to sharp tragedy.

These two can make almost any play, and O'Casey's doesn't, heaven knows, need to be made. However it is acted, it has great impact in the theater and a vastly sobering effect on the audience. Disaster stalks the characters grimly and overtakes them as they stumble. Capt. Jack Boyle is, by now, the classic example of the picturesque and "charming" swaggoner and there is nobody on the stage who can so fully picture his comic worthlessness as Mr. Fitzgerald, who created the role in Dublin more than fifteen years ago. Mr. Fitzgerald's broad, deep comedy, which never is quite submerged by his frequently incomprehensible dialect, is hilarious but it never, as it so easily might, betray the author's purpose. Mr. Fitzgerald invites you to laugh with Capt. Jack and still to find him, in the end,

hateful and portrayal of the evil of his impervious selfishness is part of O'Casey's purpose.

Miss Allgood makes the part of the captain's wife and victim similarly authentic and Miss Aileen O'Connor plays the role of their daughter touchingly. Arthur Shields is excellent in the part of "Joker" Daly and Effie Shannon has a few moving moments as the mother or a Republican irregular killed in ambush.

But "Juno and the Paycock" is a play of many facets and for the full impact of the play all are important. Routine acting in

### 'JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK'

A play in three acts by Sean O'Casey, staged by Arthur Shields; designed by Robert Edmund Jones; revived at the Mansfield Theater on January 16, 1940, by Edward Choate and Mr. Shields, in association with Mr. Jones. The cast: Mary Boyle.....Aileen O'Connor  
Juno Boyle.....Sara Allgood  
Johnny Boyle.....Harry Young  
Jeffy Devine.....Thomas Dillon  
"Capt." Jack Boyle.....Barry Fitzgerald  
"Joker" Daly.....Arthur Shields  
A Sewing Machine Vendor.....Iris Whitney  
A Coal Block Vendor.....William Stone  
Charlie Bentham, N. T.....Lucian Self  
Mrs. Maisie Madigan.....Grania O'Malley  
Mrs. Tancred.....Effie Shannon  
"Needle" Nugent.....Hal Norcross  
An Irregular Mobilizer.....Charles Keenan  
Furniture Removal Man.....Byron Russell  
Assistant Furniture Removal Man.....Jack Graham  
Neighbors.....Nancy Grady, George O'Regan and Harry Selby

other important roles can do it a good deal of harm and in the present revival routine acting does just that. Harry Young's Johnny Boyle is flat and querulous, lacking the excessive bitterness of Mr. Shields's playing of the part when the play was last revived a couple of years ago. The play wobbles a little with support lacking at Johnny's corner. A routine performance by Lucian Self as Bentham, who betrays the daughter, weakens the production further and several of the minor parts are unhappily played.

The drama can survive greater misfortune than these, particularly with Mr. Fitzgerald and Miss Allgood in it. Its revival still seems, however, a rather risky venture so soon after the Abbey's more balanced performance.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, January 17, 1940

## Barry Fitzgerald, Sara Allgood Resume Original Parts in "Juno and the Paycock"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

**A**LTHOUGH Barry Fitzgerald and Sara Allgood appeared in the original stormy performance of "Juno and the Paycock" in Dublin in 1924, they have never appeared together in New York until now. Miss Allgood played Juno in the troupe of Irish players that brought the O'Casey drama here in 1927. Barry Fitzgerald played Captain Boyle with the visiting Abbey Theatre company in 1932 and 1934. By happy chance they are now free to play together again in a revival put on at the Mansfield last evening. The performance as a whole needs considerable sharpening of mood to convey the tragic bitterness that hangs over this savage portrait of the Irish revolution. But count it as a dispensation to have two such glorious actors as Miss Allgood and Mr. Fitzgerald in immortal parts that suit them. They are both in fine fettle just now.

Probably Mr. Fitzgerald will never have a richer part. Captain Boyle can hardly be overdrawn. Mr. Fitzgerald's notion of this raffish tenement charlatan of Dublin is fantastically comic. Dressed in wrinkled rags that cling uncertainly to his portly figure, a huge belt carelessly buckled around his waist, a squalid cap at an angle on his head, Captain Boyle is stern and pompous on the surface and all bluff underneath. Mr. Fitzgerald's general unintelligibility is plainly a fault in any sort of acting. But in the light

of his comic intonations it is a fault that seems less grievous than it is. For Mr. Fitzgerald's tightly-drawn face is an essential part of his portrait—querulous and alarmed by turns; and his voice plays tunes on the character. Sometimes it rises to the sing-song of public speaking. Captain Boyle is a part that Mr. Fitzgerald enjoys. He has played it so long that he has filled out all the lines of O'Casey's racy drawing. It is one of the theatre's modern masterpieces.

Although the part of Juno is less spectacular, Miss Allgood's playing of it is a masterpiece also. Juno is the woman who takes all the responsibility in this harum-scarum family. She cannot preen herself as

extravagantly as her shiftless husband. But Miss Allgood's hot-tempered playing reaches down all through Mr. O'Casey's drama and stirs up some of the ground swell of feeling that should be there. In Miss Allgood's acting Juno is a strong character—swift of foot and mind, with the remnants of middle-class respectability coming instinctively to life on social occasions.

A tatterdemalion in her dress and a shrew in speech, she is a mother in the protection she instinctively gives to her children, and she never forgets to straighten her hair and smooth down her apron when she answers a knock on the door. The tragic scenes at the close of the play Miss Allgood acts with an anguish that gets closer to the heart of O'Casey's drama than anything else in the performance. She may well be proud of the honesty and skill of this bustling portrait of a mother against whom the black world she knows has pitilessly conspired.

As a performance of the play as a whole this revival is partly inadequate. Arthur Shields, who acts the shiftless "Joker" satisfactorily, has not succeeded in his role as director in bringing the whole play into focus. The comedy runs away with O'Casey's mordant indictment of the Dublin revolution. The black cloud of doom does not hang far enough down into the heedless life of the Boyle family. There is more pathos than bitterness in the second-act curtain. Aileen O'Connor plays a very good Mary Boyle, but the rest of the company is never better than mediocre. There is a fearless thrust of realism in O'Casey that only partly comes through the surface of this revival. Although Mr. Shields knows the play intimately, he has staged it at top speed and has not had time to beat the performance into shape. Perhaps he can still make the rest of it more worthy of the two grand actors who are in it. What Mr. Fitzgerald and Miss Allgood are doing deserves a triumphant performance of a wonderful play.

# "Juno and the Paycock"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, January 17, 1940

## Sean O'Casey's "Juno and the Paycock" Revived

Sara Allgood and Barry Fitzgerald Magnificent in an Exceptional Play

By JOHN MASON BROWN

"JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK" was, is, and will remain a "darlin'" play; at once one of the most deeply moving and richly comic dramas the modern stage has produced. Although those of us who review the theatre must have sat before it almost as many times as the music critics have faced "Aida," Sean O'Casey's tragi-comedy about a Dublin tenement house during the Black-and-Tan troubles of 1922 never loses its fascination for us.

Its texture is of no ordinary variety. Mr. O'Casey writes with a cadenced humor unmatched even in his own Ireland. He is telling, what in its basic essentials, is the simple story of a family which thinks it has become wealthy due to a legacy and then discovers that because of a badly drawn will it is as poor as it ever was. But to Mr. O'Casey this story of shifting fortunes is not, in itself the end it has been to a host of lesser dramatists.

Even the pattern loses its familiarity as he develops it. He sets it, as almost every one must remember, against the background of Dublin's revolutionary years. He used it merely as a means, at once heartbreaking and hilarious, of picturing the world—his world—in a state of "chaos." He is really writing a serious indictment of the stupidity of man and the hardness of his heart. Yet such was Mr. O'Casey's dramatic wisdom when he wrote "Juno and the Paycock" that he never seems to be preaching. His tragedy creeps up the stairs of his tenement

house, suddenly to invade the drollest of droll comedy worlds. Even when public events were on his mind, character is his interest; character observed with a gusto and a flavor as welcome as they are rare.

Mr. O'Casey's scolding Juno, and her husband, the indolent Paycock, and his cronies, the ever-veering Joxer, are two men and a woman drawn with such humor, insight, and compulsion that one never tires of them. Done indifferently, as they have been hereabouts, they can still prove joys because of the delights to be had in Mr. O'Casey's writing of them. But when they are as admirably performed as were both the Juno and the Paycock by Sara Allgood and Barry Fitzgerald at the Mansfield last night, they emerge as two of the most vivid and ingratiating people our modern theatre boasts.

Miss Allgood and Mr. Fitzgerald  
Excellent

Mr. Fitzgerald and Miss Allgood make it possible to realize again the great days of the Abbey Theatre. The Abbey has been represented locally of late by companies of indifferent abilities. But last night revived its Golden Age. From curtain rise to curtain fall, in the presence of Mr. Fitzgerald and Miss Allgood, it was impossible not to rejoice in authority of the playing and to sense that such perfected detail was the result of years of acting together.

Mr. Fitzgerald and Miss Allgood relish words as only the Irish do and speak them with glorious unction. Mr. Fitzgerald, who is of course one of the finest comic performers of our time, is at his superior best in the Paycock. His Johnny Boyle is an uproarious creation: a sly braggart, a Dublin Falstaff, an immensely humorous and human fellow projected with amazing skill.

Miss Allgood's Juno is equally exceptional. Although vocally she has had the good fortune to kiss the Blarney Stone, her gifts do not stop with the sweet persuasion of her speech. About her acting there is much the same special magic which illumines Laurette Taylor's. Watch her closely, for example, as she listens to an explanation of theosophy, and you will see as fine an example of stage listening as can anywhere be found. She brings the same radiance to suffering as she does to joy; the same radiance and the same uncanny pose. Truly she is a magnificent performer.

Arthur Shields, also an excellent actor and the director of the present highly satisfactory revival, is a competent Joxer, lacking the physical advantages Claude Cooper brought to his drollier performance of the part in an American production. Aileen O'Connor is once again pleasant as the Boyle daughter who gets into trouble. Harry Young is a good enough Johnny Boyle. And Grania O'Malley is only a fair to middling Maisie Madigan.

But Mr. O'Casey's play comes to life once more in the present production with its rare virtues clearly established, and with Mr. Fitzgerald and Miss Allgood giving performances no one should be allowed to miss.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, January 17, 1940

## Juno and the Paycock Stars Play Near-Perfect Roles

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THE current production of Sean O'Casey's tragedy of betrayal, Juno and the Paycock, which opened last night at the Mansfield Theater with Barry Fitzgerald and Sara Allgood in the leading roles, is scheduled for a limited engagement, and I would therefore advise all those who appreciate acting at its finest to hurry or they may miss one of the most delightful experiences of the season.

Mr. Fitzgerald and Miss Allgood are seen, of course, in the roles they created nearly 16 years ago, when the play was first presented at the Abbey Theater in Dublin, and long familiarity with the characters—Miss Allgood has practically lived with the play since the beginning—has

brought both portrayals to a point approaching perfection. Mr. Fitzgerald makes no attempt to modify the character of the lazy, sodden and worthless Jack Boyle by making him in any way sympathetic, but he does give full value—and more—to the grimly comic aspects of the Paycock's braggart nature. You burst with laughter at his twistings and turnings and dodgings to escape work, at his cunning devices to circumvent the necessity for earn-

ing a living, but your sympathy and understanding are reserved for the deeply tragic figure of his wife, Juno.

It is in the character of this poor woman that Miss Allgood performs so magnificently. Exactly as the play has a constantly rising interest, so with Miss Allgood's portrayal which begins on a note of quiet comedy and rises to stirring emotional heights. It is in

the final scene, when her entire world has fallen in irreparable wreckage, that she reaches her greatest power.

Mr. Fitzgerald's brother, Arthur Shields, has exchanged his former role of Johnny Boyle, in which he last appeared here with the Abbey players two years ago, for that of the opportunist sycophant, Joxer Daly, and if the change has worked some harm (for Mr. Shields gave a magnificently bitter performance of the crippled Irish traitor, and I thought his successor was one of the weak spots in the current production) his representation of Joxer was nevertheless filled with humor.

Effie Shannon is the fourth name of prominence in the cast. She was on the stage briefly, as Mrs. Tancred, the mother of the murdered Nationalist, and gave her one speech with dramatic effect. Little Aileen O'Connor, who is the loveliest colleen to come out of the Abbey Theater these last few years, carries the part of Mary nicely. But I have the feeling that she is rather designed for comedy rather than for the more tragic roles. Her distress, in the last act, at finding herself betrayed and cast off by her schoolteacher lover seemed less real than it should.

The other players filled in the background competently, and detracted little from the perfect teamwork between Miss Allgood, Mr. Fitzgerald and Mr. Shields.

Edward Choate and Mr. Shields, who produced the recent play, Kindred, are also producers of this revival. I hope they may recoup some, if not all, of their losses with this tried and true vehicle. It will not be the fault of the cast if they do not—and it certainly will not be the fault of the play.



# "Juno and the Paycock"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, January 17, 1940

## "Juno and the Paycock" Revived For Allgood and Fitzgerald

"Juno and the Paycock," drama by Sean O'Casey. Produced by Edward Choate and Arthur Shields in association with Robert Edmond Jones at the Mansfield Theatre, New York, Jan. 16, 1940.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

I AM afraid we shall have to put "Juno and the Paycock" back in the repertory. It is still effective tragi-comedy, but at the Mansfield Theatre last night it seemed pretty wobbly, as though it were having difficulty standing alone.

Sean O'Casey wrote "Juno" back in the middle twenties, when the Abbey theatre was in need of the fresh new character sense and enthusiasm he brought to it, and when the temper of a distressed people was more receptive to character studies of the poor and lowly.

He himself shortly afterwards decided that times and trends were changing, and went on to do "Shadow of a Gunman," "The Silver Tassie" and, notably, though not successfully, "Within the Gates."

Then along came a modern Irishman named Paul Vincent Carroll, and if you were to pin me down to a decision this morning I'm afraid I should say that the recent Carroll failure, which was "Kindred," was a more important contribution to the theatre this season than this revival of O'Casey.

### Patched Cast

One reason is that although the revival has three sterling Irish players in Barry Fitzgerald, Sara Allgood and Arthur Shields to carry the main roles in "Juno," with Aileen O'Connor to assist prettily, and though they have filled in with competent substitutes for the supporting roles, there is a no-

ticeable lack of consistency in the casting.

This, naturally, does not make for either a cohesive or a beguiling performance, and when Irish drama ceases to charm the judgment right out of the beholder it gives him much too much time to question and to weigh results.

Thus Barry Fitzgerald, darlin' man though he is, when attention is focused on him as one who may rescue a patched support, becomes, more of an exhibit than a character as Captain Jack, the loafer. We worry more about his shuffling sloppiness and his pinched speech than we should, and miss more of what has been, and should still be, the richest comedy trimmed with the Fitzgerald brogue the stage has known.

### Long Way From Home

And when we find Jerry Devine, and Maisie Madigan come off our own in place of Dublin's East Side, as you might say, and a Charlie Benthams from Park Avenue instead of O'Connell Street, there is a falling apart of "Juno and the Paycock" that is a little sad.

It is still a fine, solid, steady, inclusive performance of Juno that Sara Allgood gives, and a Joxer by Arthur Shields that makes us almost forget F. J. McCormick—almost but not quite. Effie Shannon does her sincere best by a difficult bit and the others serve.

But, as I say, I'm afraid we shall have to put Juno and the Paycock back in the Abbey repertory and leave it there for the present.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, January 17, 1940

## Masterpiece

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IF IT were only because it provides that wonderful comedian, Barry Fitzgerald, with his perfect role, "Juno and the Paycock" would be worth reviving again.

There are, of course, plenty of other reasons for producing this bitter and beautiful comedy once more, but perhaps the happiest one is that it gives us the opportunity to see what must certainly be just about the richest comic creation since the days of Shakespeare played to perfection by one of the most delightful actors of the modern stage. To see Mr. Fitzgerald getting all of the richness and unctious out of the role of that disreputable scoundrel, Captain Jack Boyle, is to experience one

of the great events of the theater, and I would recommend attendance to you even if "Juno and the Paycock" didn't happen to be one of the greatest plays of our times. Done many times in this vicinity during recent years, it remains as fresh and hilarious and heart-breaking as ever, and I think that by now there is no disputing its magnificence.

Although Mr. Fitzgerald's performance naturally dominates the new and welcome revival, there are other effective portrayals in it. That fine actress, Miss Sara Allgood, is, of course, beautifully moving in the lovely role of Juno, the understanding and compassionate wife of the rascally Boyle. Here, to indulge in another necessary superlative, is one of the most tender and moving characters of all drama, and you will find it played

as it should be played by the forthright Miss Allgood. Arthur Shields plays the Captain's toadying friend, Joxer, rather more modestly than he should, but it is an effective portrayal, nevertheless. I think that Miss Effie Shannon is properly moving in her one eloquently written scene as the mother of a slain Irish republican soldier, and that Miss Aileen O'Connor and Harry Young are helpful as the daughter and son of the Boyles. Unfortunately, several of the lesser parts are carelessly cast, and the production seems occasionally slipshod, but here is "Juno and the Paycock" with but a few of its values wasted.

"Juno and the Paycock" has by now achieved an enviable reputation in the

theater, and few plays have more richly deserved one. As in all great dramas—and the word "great" is used without a suggestion of exaggeration—you can find added values in each new production, and the work grows in stature with every hearing. As in so many of the finer Irish plays, the mood of "Juno and the Paycock" has a disconcerting way of shifting abruptly from the gayest of comedy to the bitterest of tragedy, a trait which somehow fits in perfectly with the mercurial Irish temperament but which occasionally makes the mood of the narrative difficult to follow by more stolid peoples. Few playwrights, however, should be disturbed by this racial characteristic of the play, for the humor is so richly delightful and the tragedy so truly and greatly tragic that the blend makes for strangely heroic drama for such modest surroundings as a Dublin tenement offers.

The magnificence of the O'Casey play comes not only from the excellence of its characterizations and the tragic power of its drama, but also from the incomparable mingling of pity and scorn in its philosophical viewpoint. O'Casey has the great gift of being able to present for your inspection the most enchantingly human of comic characters, plunge them into humorous interludes of rare gusto, turn them hastily to tragedy and fill his audience with an almost unparalleled combination of hatred and contempt for the race and compassion for its sorrows and its occasional shy heroism. Hating and loathing, he is always filled with understanding for both the pretensions and the struggles of mankind, and out of his eloquence and his bitterness and his compassion, his sense of fun and his sense of drama, he has constructed one of the true masterpieces of the theater.

# "Earl Carroll's Vanities"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, January 15, 1940

## Earl Carroll's "Vanities" Seen at the St. James

Jerry Lester, Prof. Lamberti, Some Rhinestones, and Many Show Girls

By JOHN MASON BROWN

THE world, including the world of revues, has spun around a great many times since Earl Carroll presented his last "Vanities" hereabouts. Obviously Mr. Carroll must have been too busy with his Theatre-Restaurant in Hollywood to have noticed the change. What he has brought to the St. James is indisputably the "old stuff" one member of the audience described it as being when he shouted out his opinion in no uncertain terms from a back row in the middle of the opening performance Saturday night.

There is the same old-time boast that the girls on the far side of the footlights are "the most beautiful girls in the world." There are the same old-time crystal-studded curtains, only just now so many acts are done in front of them that they end up hurting the eyes to such an extent that their only service is to force one to look away from the stage. There are, too, the familiar parades of ladies of the ensemble carrying stuffed birds in their upstretched hands or walking around dressed in strands of Christ-

mas-tree tinsel. Mr. Carroll's photograph is, of course, once again featured on the program's cover. And the name under which all this tedium travels is still the "Vanities." But, if I may say so, the new "Vanities" is by no means as good as some of the earlier editions of Mr. Carroll's revues have been. Although it follows the visual tradition

of its predecessors, at least so far as taste and intention are concerned. It is strangely shoe-string for Mr. Carroll. It seems to be getting along with dented tin instead of glistening chromium. It lacks Mr. Carroll's super-plush, uber-rhinestone touch.

### Plumes in the Dust

If that were all it lacked, forgiving the new "Vanities" would be easy. The melancholy truth is, however, that it lacks almost everything else needed to make a good revue. To be sure, it includes its performers who under happier conditions might have something to contribute. Susan Miller sings nicely. Professor Lamberti tries hard to be funny in a routine way at the xylophone. The Three Nonchalants are skilled acrobats whether or not you happen to be able to put up with their personalities. Niraka is a lady who plainly gets a lot of fun out of waving huge chiffon wings and pretending she is a butterfly. Ygor is a dancer who is as accomplished at whirling Tanya about as Tanya is at being whirled. And Jerry Lester, who is likable in spite of his material, is the most energetic and untiring, if only occasionally funny, comic to be seen hereabouts for some time.

Still this production Mr. Carroll has recruited largely from the unsung talents of Hollywood is for the most part a dud. It lacks showmanship, timing, editing, humor, gaiety, and excuse. It is so repetitious that it even falls back on repeating its stereotyped radio and moving picture imitations.

Mr. Carroll has not lost his eye for feminine pulchritude. But the West Coast sun appears to have blinded him to the needs of a revue. If you can imagine "Hellsapoppin'" without Olsen and Johnson and their gags; or "The Streets of Paris" without Bobby Clark, Abbott and Costello, and Carmen Miranda; "Paradise Lost" without Milton; or "The Inferno" without Dante, you may have some faint notion of how dispiriting the new "Vanities" is.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, January 15, 1940

## Revue from Hollywood

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

HOLLYWOOD'S loss was far from being New York's gain when Earl Carroll brought the latest edition of his "Vanities" all the way from the cinema citadel and installed it for us at the St. James Theater Saturday night. There seems to be something just a little bit wistful about the new Carroll show. The players strive with almost pathetic eagerness to please and they are almost invariably to be found begging us to like them, expressing doubts about the prospects of their success or thanking the playgoers effusively for whatever applause there may happen to be. All of this is in such contrast to the arrogance with which the Carroll minions and their commander in chief used to address us in an earlier day that the new-found plaintiveness is strangely appealing. It seems all the more discourteous, therefore, to tell the hopeful visitors from the California fleshpots that their revue is an exceptionally feeble and unimaginative one, lacking in zest, humor and tunefulness.

It is getting to be so that a revue which offers a comic xylophonist and an imitator of radio stars in its leading roles automatically warns us to beware of it. Mr. Carroll gives top spots in his revue to gentlemen of both schools of expression, and, although they are probably as good as their legions of predecessors—or, for all I know, imitators—they do clutter up the current "Vanities" excessively. Other performers include knock-about comics, refugees from California nightclubs, exotic dancers of one sort or another, benignly smiling showgirls, a few singers and some incidental participants, all of whom labor determinedly but to a minimum of avail. Perhaps the one that is least unsuccessful is Jerry Lester, who is far from a master of hilarity but who strives so unceasingly that you end by thinking that at least he deserves a chance with better material.

There once was a time when Mr. Carroll's shows were at least funny. Watching the current version, you would hardly believe it.

As a sort of modern touch, Mr. Carroll, who hasn't bothered much about modernizing the rest of his show, has seen to it that his performers sing and talk in awful proximity to a microphone. The unfortunate result is that both music and comedy blare out at you with unrelenting fiendishness, emphasizing more than is necessary the weakness of the new "Vanities" in both fields. Meanwhile, the girls—Mr. Carroll still is convinced that they are the most beautiful in the world—are wandering about with smiling benevolence and in varying degrees of dress and undress as Gold Birds, Black Birds, Swans, Ostriches, Fire Birds, Can-Can Girls, Tahitian Ladies and Hitch Hikers. Mr. Carroll's idea of musical-show heaven is to have his girls appear in numbers called "Fantasy of Feathers," and you will find another of them here, as well as a reminiscent Bolero Finale. Could it be that the old "Vanities" were really no better than this unfortunate revue would suggest? I refuse to believe it. Let's all blame Hollywood.

### These Are But a Few of the Many Subscribers to Critics' Theatre Reviews

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Indianapolis Civic Theatre  
Richmond Little Theatre  
Pasadena Playhouse

# "Earl Carroll's Vanities"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, January 15, 1940

## Carload of Hollywood Beauties Decorate Carroll's "Vanities"

"Earl Carroll's Vanities," music and lyrics by Dorcas Cochran and Charles Rosoff.  
Produced at the St. James Theatre, New York, Jan. 13, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

YOU get your money's worth of beauty in Earl Carroll's Hollywood "Vanities," which came straight from the coast to the St. James Theatre Saturday night. And your money's worth of fun, too, it seems to me.

Having his pick of all the picture struck beauties who have drifted to the Beauty Mart on the Pacific the Earl has taken sixty of them and brought them East. The resulting lineup is rather dazzling, and the outstanding feature of the new show.

Naturally there are a few veterans among them, too. The dependable brunette, Beryl Wallace, is an old "Vanities" standby, for one, and few of the newer beauties show off better than she.

Having assembled his specialty acts for his glorified theatre and restaurant in Hollywood Mr. Carroll has been able to turn up a new team or two and these add freshness to the program.

The Nonchalants, for example, are an acrobatic trio, with dialogue, who have not been active in the Broadway theatres before, so far as I know. May be well known to the night spots, but on the stage their patter is fresh and their tricks new.

### Good Old Xylophone

Prof. Lamberti is an old hand at the vaudeville game but, as Mr. Carroll points out, he has developed a new line of comedy on the

Coast, tying in the strip tease with a xylophone solo with effective casualness.

Jerry Lester is a brash young master of ceremony such as you might expect to find in San Francisco. His scoring average is good, though not too consistent, and Susan Miller, blonde and shrill, lets neither word nor note of the songs she "puts over" escape you. "Angel" is the number she and her boss are most certain you will like.

The skits are fairly clean, as I recall them. A dash of dirt here and there, but nothing to worry about. Ygor and Tanya are an excellent dance team and Johnny Woods one of those radio imitators with a great variety of recognizable subjects.

### EARL CARROLL VANITIES

A revue in two acts and fifty scenes, directed and produced by Mr. Carroll; music and lyrics by Dorcas Cochran and Charles Rosoff; dances by Eddie Priest; costumes and scenery by Jean Le Seyer. Presented at the St. James Theatre on January 13, 1940, by Mr. Carroll. Among those in the cast are: Beryl Wallace, Norman Lawrence, Jerry Lester, Johnny Woods, Ygor and Tanya, the three Nonchalants, Susan Miller, Prof. Lamberti, Lela Moore, Gary Stone and Nirska.

### Patticakers Shy

Like most glorified floor shows this one spills out into the aisles. On one occasion timid aisle-seat gentlemen are invited to pat-ticake with the beauties, illustrating a song called "I Want My Mama." Nice work if you have an urge for it, but the patticakers were noticeably shy opening night. Waiting for Al Smith to lead them, probably.

Despite Mr. Carroll's "indelible leaning toward the drama," to quote the program, he is still the master of the assembled beauty show. His Hollywood experience has been good for him. It gives him a new beauty and talent field from which to draw.

It is good for us that he still has the Broadway urge. Reassuring to feel that we shall be kept in touch.

The new "Vanities" ran pretty late Saturday, but Mr. Carroll is trimming it down, they tell me. It should be in form from tonight on.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, January 15, 1940

## Earl Carroll's 'Vanities' Comes East from Hollywood with Some of Those Girls

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IN THE program to the "Vanities," which opened at the St. James on Saturday evening, the diffident Earl Carroll describes his West Coast frolic as "America's greatest revue," populated with "the most beautiful girls in the world." No revue that frantically hugs the microphone can be much more than a pain in the ear. But no one will be disposed to deprive Mr. Carroll of his venerable slogan about the girls, personally selected to smooth the fretful brow of the Gotham playgoer. They are lovely. As usual, Mr. Carroll tricks them out with those solemn creations of feathers, stuffed birds, plumes and bubbles and he has not wasted much time teaching them to dance or sing. But they are beautiful, as he shyly points out, and it is very sociable to have them around in the pink-and-white of good condition.

At half-past ten o'clock on the opening night the "Vanities" seemed to be a pretty good show on Mr. Carroll's terms. For Professor Lamberti had just about finished his act at the xylophone. The professor is wonderful. Bald on top and mild fringes of hair

darting out at the sides, chewing gum and grinning with magnetic gusto, the professor has a sense of humor that is completely hospitable and the same ideas about music that made Herb Williams one of the theatre's great men. As low comedy, spiked with familiar gags, the professor's act needs to be studied by all the theatre's scholars this Winter, particularly for his artistic rendition of the choruses of "Wishing." That is a masterpiece of

musicology. If Mr. Carroll were less frugal a showman he would confine Professor Lamberti's appearances to the one act at the xylophone. All the later appearances destroy the illusion of the professor's heroic virtuosity.

There is another good comic in the show if he ever gets up sufficient courage to stay away from the microphone and if he will cut his material in half. Jerry Lester is an exuberant patter man with a breezy line of goods. He also contributes a funny burlesque of burlesque dancing, as disenchanted as Fanny Brice. Although his appearances are too many and too long at times, Lester is comic enough to be worth saving by winnowing out his bad material. Something also should be said for the numerous acrobatics of the Three Nonchalants, whose casual air is ridiculously amusing.

But Mr. Carroll makes his playgoers suffer for the good things he has to offer. By quarter of twelve the "Vanities" seems a good deal less entertaining than at the close of the first act. Whatever songs he has to offer he strangles in the microphone. The music is undistinguished. The dancing is confined to a whirling adagio number by Ygor and Tanya, a clever dance of the lovers by Lela Moore and some Harlem style hooking by Four Hot Shots. One series of radio imitations is stupefying enough without repeating the formula. Some of the costumes are very prettily designed in attractive colorings, although the scenery is on antique models.

Mr. Carroll may yet make a good show out of the material he has brought from the West Coast. After all, Professor Lamberti is immensely funny and the girls are extremely beautiful. The microphones, which very nearly make this "Vanities" a menace, could be yanked out and tossed into the alley, which would not be a bad idea at that.



# "Earl Carroll's Vanities"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, January 15, 1940

## Earl Carroll's 'Vanities' Opens At the St. James Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

**E**ARL CARROLL placed girls on display Saturday evening at the St. James Theater, a new crop having grown to beauty since last Mr. Carroll beguiled the weary business man. It is a new "Vanities" and it fills the eye. Thanks to a singularly braying loud speaker system, it also rather deafens the ear, but what is the ear at a show of Mr. Carroll's?

Once or twice in the old days, when scenery and lots of it was the thing, Mr. Carroll may have achieved more gaudy backdrops for his beauties than are now revealed in Forty-fourth street. The wisps of feather and fur, the fragments of spangled chiffon, may once have been of an even more luxurious rarity. But the girls are the thing, and girls are just as lovely now as they ever were, and Mr. Carroll's eye for

them just as good. That seems to be the chief thing about the "Vanities"; that, and the fact that it was a lot too long Saturday evening

and will have to be clipped into shape. But in the old days, when lavishness was the note, revues were always too long, so that is in the tradition too.

Mr. Carroll has been on the West Coast and he has apparently picked up his comedians there. In spite of this, several of them are funny—there are some amusing acrobats, for example, complete with a man who can gag while on the shoulders of his fellows and who, in rather unfortunate falsetto, looks at them and exclaims: "Acrobats! I hate acrobats!" It's a little too falsetto, but still funny. Prof. Lambert, who clowns with aid from a xylophone, is funny and Jerry Lester comes pretty close to being a scream. A little more suavity, a little less effort to blast his way through, and Mr. Lester can forget the "San Francisco night spots" and settle down here.

The songs are characteristic of the Carroll revue, and so is the dancing—it's all characteristic, as a matter of fact. There are striking scenes and stately girls turning slowly to be admired and no more swaddled than the law allows. There are a few moments when the humor is a little unfortunate, but no more than one would expect and little to hurt the sensibilities even of the squeamish. Some pistols are fired, and the girls come into the audience on, proving that Mr. Carroll has heard of "Hellzapoppin'."

Otherwise, except for the extraordinary length, it's regulation Carroll. And mighty pretty girls.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, January 15, 1940

## Earl Carroll's Vanities Opens at St. James Theater

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

**S**OME friends had invited us to their home Saturday evening to see a few reels of their own movies, (you know, Knights of Pythias Day at the New York World's Fair, and the Pageant of the Knit Goods Industry at San Francisco, and Beautiful Hikes in the Old Granite State) but duty compelled us to go to the St. James Theater to see the new Earl Carroll Vanities, so we had to decline.

As the evening wore on and out, my somewhat mild regret at having missed the serene beauty of Ye Olde Tea Shoppe at Derry and the techni-colored majesty of the Trylon and Perisphere, mounted almost to frenzied grief. Never before, I reflected,

had I realized what a splendid fellow, what a hospitable man, what a genius at entertainment, was that host whose invitation I had so unwisely turned down.

For if there was ever a more banal performance, more stale and unimaginative material, or sillier comedy than in this long and tedious parade of vapid nonsense, I have yet to see it.

You may not believe it, but there is actually a venerable dame in it who does a butterfly dance (sometimes called a flame dance and sometimes a fire dance) with yards and yards of gauze attached to two long poles, while colored lights play upon her jellied anatomy from below. This bit of originality was one of the evening's high spots.

Mr. Carroll still clings to his innocent fiction that the most beautiful girls in the world are to be found in his Vanities, and since beauty is a matter of personal taste, any argument to the contrary would be futile. It might be said here, however, that if 60 per cent of them have been brought from Hollywood, as is asserted by the advance notices, the dent in the Hollywood beauty market is still not appreciable.

In addition to the ancient butterfly dance, Mr. Carroll, in another burst of daring originality, gives us a can-can number, which only the most naive or most hardened producer would dare to do, since we haven't seen more than four or five hundred of them in the last three years.

Among the other liabilities are a rapid-fire comedian who convulses himself, if not the audience; three acrobats whose comedy is distressingly infantile; another imitator of radio stars; two acrobatic "dancers"; four Negro tappers, and an eccentric musician.

In an obvious endeavor to stimulate audience enthusiasm after the fashion of the geniuses of Hellzapoppin, a "patticake" number was introduced in which the customers were embarrassed at being requested to play that simple game of childhood's fond memory with the Carroll girls. Unfortunately for this well-meant invitation, the audience sulked, and no one, beyond perhaps Tommy Manville, felt inclined to raise a hand to the beauties except in self-defense.

The dancing? Well, from my position, it seemed that most of the girls were creating their own routines as they went along. And what singing there was, largely by Miss Susan Miller, was distorted by a piece of radio engineering that made every voice sound like a fireboat siren.

At intervals, during the long, long night of Jan. 12-14, there were hints from the stage that if New York doesn't like this show the poor little pigeons in it will have to hitch-hike back to California. Indeed, there was a song (or what passed for one) to that effect. I think that Dorcas Cochran and Charles Rosoff, who wrote the music and lyrics, must be clairvoyant.

### These Are But a Few of the Many Subscribers to Critics' Theatre Reviews

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# "John Henry"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, January 11, 1940

## 'John Henry,' With Paul Robeson, Opens at the Forty-fourth Street

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

PAUL ROBESON strides through the many scenes of "John Henry," which opened at the Forty-fourth Street Theater last evening, and his great voice rolls out in songs which have the authentic cadence of his race. Mr. Robeson is the positive virtue of "John Henry." It is he, and not the fabulous hero of the title, who gives it such stature as it has. It is he, rather than Roark Bradford, the author, who is equal to the heroic legend.

John Henry was the Paul Bunyan of Negro folklore. He strode the cotton lands like a Hercules, and when his people were bowed down his muscles of steel lifted their burdens. He carried bales which staggered three men, and laid rails on the ties with his bare hands. He was born with a cotton hook in his hand, and was a man of mighty valor and indefatigable in love. All these things Mr. Bradford mentions in his play, in words and in songs to which Jacques Wolfe has written music. And, except for Mr. Robeson and one or two others, and one or two scenes vigorous with life, nothing much comes of it.

Somehow the legend has dwindled in Mr. Bradford's hands. There are glimpses of the mythological John Henry; moments when legend takes a stride or two. One of these is at the end, when John Henry pits his strength against the machine, and dies as he staggers under great bales which steam flips idly aboard the river boat. There, for an instant and before irrelevances swallow it, there is a feeling of the death not only of a man but of a legend. But for the most part the story is only of a big and baffled man who is unlucky in love, and unlucky because

of a misunderstanding slighter than those which part the tinted lovers of musical comedy.

It is evident that something has fallen out of the play since it was first written, and even since its recent publication in book form. Somebody has prettied it up, for no evident reason. But even in the published version it was inadequate, and nothing except Mr. Robeson in the production serve to disguise its inadequacies. "John Henry" simply isn't big enough for John Henry. And the unidentified director has done very little to help the author. With a large cast and the rush of Mr. Wolfe's music, the play is still permitted to become static. Most of the time it seems too small not only for its theme, but for its stage.

Mr. Robeson sings beautifully and acts with directness and force. Ruby Elzy, as his true love, also sings extremely well and acts with simplicity and gentleness. Musa Williams, Myra Johnson and several others in the pre-

### "JOHN HENRY"

A play in two acts and eleven scenes by Roark Bradford; music by Jacques Wolfe; designed by Albert Johnson; choral direction by Leonard dePaur; costumes by John Hambleton; presented on January 10, 1940, at the Forty-fourth Street Theatre by Sam Byrd. The Cast:

|                   |       |                      |
|-------------------|-------|----------------------|
| Blind Lemon       | ..... | Joshua White         |
| Deaf Man          | ..... | Ray Teates           |
| Julie Anne's Papa | ..... | George Jones, Jr.    |
| Julie Anne        | ..... | Ruby Elzy            |
| Old Aunt Dinah    | ..... | Minto Cato           |
| Hell Buster       | ..... | Robert Harvey        |
| Man named Sam     | ..... | Joe Attles           |
| Ruby              | ..... | Musa Williams        |
| John Henry        | ..... | Paul Robeson         |
| A Rouser          | ..... | James Lightfoot      |
| Floyd             | ..... | Lloyd Howlett        |
| Nud               | ..... | J. DeWitt Spencer    |
| Walking Boss      | ..... | Alexander Gray       |
| Poor Selma        | ..... | Myra Johnson         |
| Pimps' Quartet    | ..... | Merritt Smith        |
|                   |       | Wyer Owens Handy     |
|                   |       | Leola                |
|                   |       | William Woolfolk     |
|                   |       | Eva Vaughan          |
|                   |       | Alice Carter         |
|                   |       | Mattie Washington    |
|                   |       | Benveneta Washington |
|                   |       | Alice White          |
|                   |       | Ruth Gibbs           |
|                   |       | Marie Francis        |
|                   |       | Mildred Lester       |
|                   |       | Joe Attles           |
|                   |       | Alexander Gray       |
|                   |       | Benveneta Washington |
|                   |       | Ray Teates           |
|                   |       | Merritt Smith        |
|                   |       | Louis Gilbert        |
|                   |       | William Woolfolk     |
|                   |       | J. DeWitt Spencer    |
|                   |       | C. W. Scott          |

dominantly Negro cast are excellent. Albert Robeson's settings are picturesque. But Mr. Bradford has given them a skimpy drama to go on with.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, January 11, 1940

## Paul Robeson Brilliant in Bradford's John Henry

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

PAUL ROBESON scored a brilliant personal success last night in his return to the New York stage in the role of Roark Bradford's legendary hero, John Henry, the giant roustabout who died when he tried to lick a steam engine tottin' cotton bales.

Supported by an excellent singing cast Mr. Robeson, quite like John Henry himself, nevertheless does 90 per cent of the artistic labor of the new musical drama, and the result is an evening of contentment and satisfaction.

If there is criticism from some quarters that "John Henry" is rather a series of spirituals done in the modern manner and strung together by slight explanatory dialogue, there is still no room for complaint. Whenever Mr. Robeson is on the stage—there is nearly all the time—there is not only good singing but masterful, compelling drama.

John Henry, as you probably know, is based on Mr. Bradford's stories of the South's Paul Bunyan, the mighty man who could load a big boat before sundown, or build the Yeller Dog railroad in a day, or dam the Mississippi in an afternoon. But every Samson must have a Delilah, and John Henry dies when his heart is broken in two places—first when his woman cracked it by giving away his supper to a no 'count gambling man, second when he fights his last battle of strength against the steam engine.

Sam Byrd, who produces John Henry seems to have been undecided under what classification the new work falls—whether it is "lyric drama" or "a drama with music"—so he evades the issue by saying merely that "Sam Byrd presents Paul Robeson in John Henry" and letting the drama and music departments fight it out.

Actually the presentation is more musical than dramatic, but it would be an exceedingly captious man who could object to that, and there is, after all, far more plot to it than you will find in the average musical show, or, for that matter, in some of the hackneyed operas.

The saga of John Henry is that he is the wonder and admiration of all the world for his valiant feats of strength. He is lured away

from his true love by the flattery of a fancy lady, but is rescued from her clutches in time to finish building the Yeller Dog Railroad, build the Mississippi levees and save his people from the flood. This accomplished, he returns to his mate to find that she has given his evening meal to his rival, and although she did it out of pity he cannot believe that any woman who would give his supper away can be faithful.

He returns to the river landing, after wrecking a New Orleans ginmill, in time to compete with the new steam engine, but in his final defeat he has the satisfaction of knowing that his wife has followed him and is working at his side.

The music, as I indicated, is of the spiritual type, but with a strong modern influence, and in the choral effects it is particularly striking. Mr. Robeson's chief opportunities come in the numbers "How Come I'm Born wid a Hook in My Hand," "Got a Head Like a Rock (and a heart like a marble stone)," and "Sundown in My Soul." The audience enthusiastically demanded, but did not get, encores of these numbers.

The performance also provided a triumph, from the musical standpoint, for another member of the cast, Ruby Elzy, playing opposite Mr. Robeson. Miss Elzy's voice—clear, powerful, but with a touch of plaintiveness no white singer can quite achieve—was at its best in a delightful melody called "Capeless Love." Joshua White, who not only sings but plays guitar accompaniments through a greater part of the play, is a sterling addition, and Myra Johnson, Musa Williams and Minto Cato are capable and appealing in less important roles.

Although there is no tremendous opportunity for Mr. Robeson to demonstrate all he can do with that magnificent voice of his, there is sufficient to show its clarity and prodigious power, and his acting has lost none of its emotional strength. Physically, of course, he is eminently fitted to undertake the role of the gigantic hero.

It is good to have Mr. Robeson back.

# "John Henry"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, January 11, 1940

## Paul Robeson

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IT WAS a wonderful idea to cast Paul Robeson in the role of the Negro folk hero, John Henry. With his splendid physique and his superb voice, Mr. Robeson is an actor of truly heroic presence, an epic figure of a man destined for epic roles. A sort of racial legend in himself, he is ideally suited to appear in a legendary character. Not only does he look the part, which is the most important quality of all, but he can both sing it and act it to perfection, and all that the playwright has to do is to suit a role to a man born to it. Yet the sad news this morning is that Roark Bradford, the author, and Jacques Wolfe, the composer, with one of the best ideas in the world in their hands, have failed with singular completeness. Their halfhearted effort to achieve musical drama on the heroic scale is destroyed by the complete failure of both drama and music, and Mr. Robeson is forced to carry the burden alone. He might have managed to do so if he had not been so hopelessly harassed by the ineptness of his material.

Perhaps there is something ungrateful about being harsh to a dramatic offering

which permits Mr. Robeson to occupy the stage most of the time and to sing a great number of songs, no matter how unexceptional. It is, however, difficult to be tolerant about the lost opportunity represented by "John Henry." Somehow you would think that not only was Mr. Robeson ideal for the title role but that Mr. Bradford was the perfect librettist for the tale of the simple, credulous, gigantically powerful Negro of the cotton country, the man who could achieve epic

physical feats but was a baby in the hands of glibful men and desiring women. Yet all that Mr. Bradford does with the saga of this Negro brother-in-spirit of the great Paul Bunyan is to provide a series of undramatic episodes that consist chiefly of John Henry misunderstanding his loving Julie Anne and being fooled by the sly schemes of his enemy, the Man Named Sam. Nor has Mr. Wolfe given us a score that staves in any way for the frailties of the libretto.

Of course, Mr. Robeson plays what there is of the role of John Henry with deep feeling, great skill and fine sincerity and sings it magnificently, and, under his brilliant ministrations, the tale does come to life for fitful moments. It soon lapses into lethargy again, despite the star's valiant efforts, and leaves you once more with a feeling of baffled annoyance at the stage's failure to find a proper work of art for one of the nation's most distinguished artists. The minor roles are of comparative unimportance, but Miss Ruby Elzy is excellent as the faithful Julie Anne and Joe Attles is properly effective as the Man Named Sam. A word should be said, too, for Albert Johnson's settings and for the occasional liveliness of the mass scenes. What is important, though, is that Paul Robeson is making his first appearance in the local theater since 1932; that he is a more impressive actor and singer than ever before, and that he is wasted in a dismal attempt to provide what should have been the perfect role for him.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, January 11, 1940

## Paul Robeson in "John Henry" At the 44th Street Theatre

A Musical Evening Among the Negroes, Score by Jacques Wolfe

By WILLELLA WALDORF

"JOHN HENRY," which brought Paul Robeson back to the Broadway stage last night at the Forty-fourth Street Theatre, was heralded as a play with music by Roark Bradford and Jacques Wolfe. It turned out to be a concert by a large company of Negro singers, headed by Mr. Robeson, plus one baritone solo by a white man, Alexander Gray. The concert was lavishly staged against atmospheric backgrounds designed by Albert Johnson, and Mr. Bradford (who wrote the book upon which Marc Connelly based the celebrated "Green Pastures") tossed in a few words now and then, but the evening was chiefly devoted to solos, duets, quartets, octettes, choruses and ensemble singing. So thoroughly musical was it and so lacking in drama, that there were times when we thought seriously of sending out an usher with a hurly call for Samuel Chotzinoff.

The idea upon which Mr. Bradford's series of episodes was based is the legend about John Henry, the "Strong Man" of the Negroes, who's "got a head like a rock, and a heart like a marble stone."

It is hard to imagine any one better suited to such a role than Paul Robeson, and it's too bad Mr. Bradford didn't get around to writing the play. The producer, Sam Byrd, however, has gone right ahead just as if a play were there, and the result is two acts and eleven scenes of generally pleasant Negro

music by Mr. Wolfe sung as only Negroes can sing it.

The episodes, added up, sound a bit like those interminable stories about the Hovver Boys, John Henry in the Black River country, John Henry at Aunt Dinah's cabin, John Henry at the corner of Third and Bird Streets, John Henry at the Canebrake, John Henry at the Yeller Dog Railroad, John Henry at Yeller Dog Supper Camp, John Henry takes a steamboat down the Mississippi, John Henry in New Orleans, and John Henry, back at Black River Landing, encounters the machine age, and dies.

The legendary "Strong Man," who can make the sun shine merely by ordering it around, and who does the work of six men

with a cotton hook, is still a simple fellow who resents it when "his woman" gives away his dinner to "The Man Named Sam." He wanders away to Third and Bird Streets, where the Pimps' Quartet and the Fancy Ladies' Octette are holding forth, and Poor Emma, a very fancy lady indeed, is seductively attired in scarlet. But he goes right back to his woman, Julie Ann—until she gives away his dinner.

John Henry is nice to listen to when Mr. Robeson and the chorus are giving their all to Mr. Wolfe's music, but there is no denying that an evening's concert with stage trappings, but no play worth mentioning, becomes monotonous. It would be better, we greatly fear, to take away the trappings and simply call it a concert. Two directors bit the dust in preparing this production, so the Broadway legend goes, and neither is identified in the program. It is not precisely surprising.

Mr. Robeson's big booming voice is still lusty and often thrilling to hear, and it is pleasant to have him back again in the Times Square sector after seven years away, mostly in foreign lands. That even he partakes of the general tendency toward monotony is inevitable, but he is a legend, he figures himself, and a joy to listen to. The Negro principals and chorus supporting him perform, as is usual when Negroes are involved, with zest and spirit. When they are called upon to build railroad in song, they build it with all the rhythm and strength at their command. When they are steamboat hands in the Mississippi, they seize upon Mr. Wolfe's music and zoom it out at the audience.

The men's voices, on the whole, are easier to listen to than the women's. Ruby Elzy, who plays John Henry's "woman," sang several numbers fervently, but she has a tendency to wax shrill and hard on her top notes. Alexander Gray, the lone white man in the troupe, did well by his one solo about railroadin', and it was, in general, a lavish musical evening.

"John Henry" is recommended cautiously to theatregoers who particularly enjoy Negro music and song. For the theatregoing public who is accustomed to more drama with its music, we are not so sure that it will serve.

Sorry. Couldn't find an usher, but have sent a copy boy in search of Mr. Chotzinoff.



# "John Henry"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, January 11, 1940

## Paul Robeson Appears as John Henry in a Music Drama Based on the Southern Legend

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IT IS something to see Paul Robeson again and to hear the cavernous roar of his voice. He has not walked on a Broadway stage since the revival of "Show Boat" in 1932. Now he is appearing in "John Henry," a music drama by Roark Bradford and Jacques Wolfe, which opened at the Forty-fourth Street Theatre last evening. An uneven show with music that is also of mixed quality, it serves chiefly to renew acquaintance with a man of magnificence who ought to be on the stage frequently in plays that suit him. For there is something heroic about this huge man with a deep voice and great personal dignity. Count as one of the theatre's extravaganzas the fact that Paul Robeson is not an active figure in it.

For a number of reasons "John Henry" should be ideal material for him. The gigantic cotton-roller and track-layer of the South, ought to make a play of imaginative stature, and Roark Bradford, who wrote the sketches on which "The Green Pastures" was based, ought to be the man to bring this Negro legend to the stage. But the music drama he and Jacques Wolfe have written is hardly more than a series of miscellaneous pictures in the rolling career of a man of muscle—a desultory narrative, underwritten and put together in perfunctory fashion. Neither Mr. Bradford nor Mr. Wolfe, who wrote the

music, appears to have much instinct for the stage.

If the occasion were a concert instead of a stage drama, Mr. Wolfe's music might be better appreciated. For some of it is extraordinarily beautiful, like the choruses on a river boat in the second act, like the songs of the track laborers and John Henry's braggart cotton-rolling song. As John Henry's sweetheart, Ruby Elzy sings "Careless Love" with the mournful sweetness of a girl of river country. Mr. Robeson sings any number of songs with the black grandeur of a superb native artist. "I'm Born in the Country" is a triumphant song as he gives it. There are also some good numbers for Joshua White, who plays a banjo in nearly every scene.

In the theatre a good deal of Mr. Wolfe's music seems much too intricate for roasting singing and simple enjoyment. And even his most eloquent music keeps the scenes static. "John Henry" is an enormous production in seven scenes with a huge cast. Albert Johnson has equipped it with a full suit of land and river sets, although somewhat unimaginatively. More than one director has tried to whip this mass of material into a drama that moves on the stage. But the melancholy fact seems to be that "John Henry" has little of the theatre's magical genius, despite the splendor of individual numbers. It serves chiefly to remind us that some one ought to write a musical drama that would arouse Paul Robeson's spirit and keep him on the stage.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, January 11, 1940

## "John Henry" Bears Down Kinda Heavy on Singin' Paul Robeson

"John Henry," music drama by Roark Bradford and Jacques Wolfe. Produced by Sam Byrd at the 44th Street Theatre, New York, Jan. 10, 1940.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

HE'S a singin' fool, that Paul Robeson. Proved it in "John Henry," the music drama that Sam Byrd and numerous associates presented at the 44th St. Theatre last night. Yes, sir—a singin' fool.

And a singin' wonder, too. You could spend weeks walkin' from here to Carnegie Hall and back, using Olin Downs as a guide, without meeting as rich and warm and rounded a baritone voice as his.

But that "John Henry" play—that is something else. I don't know how many directors, some expert, others just directors, have tried to mold it into some sort of holding and satisfying entertainment.

I saw it first at a preview performance Monday night. Charles Friedman's name was at the masthead then, but yesterday I understand he withdrew.

It seemed a happier entertainment last night than it was Monday night. Shorter and a little more spirited. With another director or two "John Henry" might be whipped into shape, as they say, by the end of the week.

### Smothering Score

As it stands the Roark Bradford book is fairly smothered by the Jacques Wolfe score. A nice score, take it song by song, and one ensemble with another. But it is all in the

same key and the same mood, and woos melody from the same wall.

Which, I have no doubt, is well within both Negro character and tradition. But, combined with the book, it isn't easy to take.

Sorry Marc Connelly, who did so much for Mr. Bradford's "Green Pastures," was not interested. He could, I think, have brought proportion and an appealing story out of the Bradford material.

John Henry, according to the deep South's legends, is the boatfullest and the wonder-fullest big black boy that ever lived.

"Cause I'm big and bad, and six foot tall, and my feet don't tech the ground," boasts

John Henry. "'Cause I works like a man, and I plays like a fool, and I rambles from town to town. Lawd, Lawd! And I roam the wide worl' round."

John Henry in the play is rollin' more cotton than any five other rousters. Defyin' frivilin' women, too. But he falls finally when he meets Julie Anne and is happy for a day or a year. Then Julie gives him supper to a man named Sam, and the world goes sour.

### A Driftin' Man

John Henry drifts to Noo Yawleams and the cast drifts with him. They try to bring him to his knees in Mink Eye's saloon, but his heart is burnin' up. There's "Sundown in My Soul," he sings (one of his best songs, incidentally), and decides to go back rollin' cotton.

They've put in a steam lifter since John Henry left. He isn't goin' to be burned down by that sorta thing. He challenges the steam engine to match its power with his muscles of steel. The steam hoist wins.

They lay John Henry out on a couple of cotton bales. Then they bring in Julie Anne, who has killed herself in grief, and lay her beside John Henry. It's a grand song service, but it, too, is overdone.

Robeson was in fine voice last night. He is a perfect choice for the role. He could have waited until midnight and the crowd would still have demanded more.

Ruby Elzy is the heroine and Joe Attles is the man named Sam. Both good performers. Also Williams, Joshua White, Myra Johnson, the stargazy girl, Alexander Gray, the white boss, all help.

So do imaginative Albert Johnson settings. Nice choruses. But there's still work to do on "John Henry."

# "The Male Animal"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, January 10, 1940

## "The Male Animal" Best Comedy To Reach Broadway in Weeks

"The Male Animal," comedy by James Thurber and Elliott Nugent. Produced by Herman Shumlin at the Cort Theatre, New York, Jan. 9, 1940.

★ ★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

THE first theatre cheers of 1940 go to James Thurber, Elliott Nugent and their new college comedy, "The Male Animal." Welcoming them to the Cort Theatre last night seemed to me the most stimulating theatregoing adventure we have enjoyed in weeks.

And why? Well, for one thing, because "The Male Animal" is the best comedy since "Life With Father" set a new pace for the current season.

And, for another, because it not only brings home from Hollywood young Mr. Nugent, one of our former hopes as a native light comedian to whom the American stage tradition clings closely and affectionately, but because it also gives James Thurber, one of our more literate humorists, his first chance at comedy writing.

This experience should give him the confidence humorists, turned playwright, must have if they are to go on helping the living theatre, which could do with a little help right now.

"The Male Animal" makes use of most of the tried tricks of comedy with fine success. The story is simple and sure. A young professor of English in a midwestern university, married to a pretty young wife whom he caught, as he fears, on the rebound when the handsome halfback hero of their day lost his

hold upon her affections, faces a pair of dilemmas.

### "Communist, Communist!"

Not only does the handsome footballer return for a college game, with a normal male urge to revive his more pleasant social contacts, but the same week-end the young professor is named editorially as a potential Communist in the college paper.

The fun swirls around these two wisps of plot. The professor tries desperately to rationalize his primitive reaction of jealousy, and face the threatened break-up of his home as a sensible human should. He also suffers

from his inner search for sufficient courage to stand up and defend his liberal convictions against the thick-headed Tory trustees of the college.

Few comedy scenes have been either more skillfully written or played than that in which the professor seeks, with the help of a lowball or two, to convince a fellow radical that the male animal, after all, must react as does the tiger, or even the penguin, once its home is invaded. It ranks, I think, with the best drinking scenes developed in American comedy. Only the best of them are so well held within reasonable and plausible bounds.

### Fine Cast

Mr. Nugent, a good comedian from his "Kempy" days, has never stepped far out of the one character he plays most naturally, which would be that of the timid soul who would be ever so willing to fight back if, first, he could think of a good reason for fighting, and, second, he had anything to fight with. Within his range he is a facile and skillful funmaker, and he knows almost as many tricks as George Abbott. His Professor Turner is a fine job.

Leon Ames comes to a deserved prominence as the happy old grad who once loved the heroine, Ivan Simpson, also a welcome stranger, lends a nice touch as a battered dean. Ruth Matteson is modestly attractive as the wife, and the others, including Don DeFore, late the sacrificial ironworker in "Steel," Gene Tierney, a lively ingenue, and Robert Scott are most helpful.

Herman Shumlin has done well as a director of comedy, and that is a bit of a record. Aline Bernstein did the set, and that's nice, too. Everything dandy just now at the Cort.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, January 10, 1940

## Season's Return

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

JUST as all of us were getting pretty gloomy about the dramatic season, James Thurber and Elliott Nugent come along with a gay and winning comedy to cheer us up again. It is called, as you must have heard, "The Male Animal," and I think we are safe in heralding it as the newest hit of the town. A singularly happy combination of Thurber's comic brilliance and Nugent's gift for human and likable characterization, the new play achieves the feat of going to the unpromising field of the college campus for its background, using Vanzetti's eloquent letter to his daughter as a serious moment in the midst of laughter and providing a delightful narrative that takes football, sex, academic freedom and the turning worm in its handsome stride. With a second act that is both pure hilarity and pure Thurber, "The Male Animal" sets a pace that it does not quite keep up with at all moments, but, with Mr. Nugent and an excellent cast playing it splendidly, the latest Broadway arrival is cause for great satisfaction.

Even when "The Male Animal" is taking considerable time to get started, there is the pleasure of watching a comedy in which the characters seem so happily human. Although they consist of such nominally familiar people as the shy and academic young teacher of English; the dean whose spirit has been broken; the returning football star of a decade ago; the bullying trustee and the youth-

ful campus radical, the people of the comedy are freshly observed and knowingly written. Despite the fact that it brings the still controversial name of Vanzetti into the narrative and deals with the high matter of academic freedom, the plot is not particularly striking for its originality, either. The important thing is the mad hilarity of the humor which combines so effectively with a note of cool sanity that pervades the observation and the thinking of the new work, giving us a comedy that is both vastly amusing and vastly refreshing in the modest and intelligent liberalism of the editorial viewpoint.

It is not by any means that "The Male Animal" is a play with a message. In truth, the engaging liberalism and tolerance of the

narrative are merely the spirit and the background of the extremely enjoyable evening in the theater that the work offers. It is the deft and the original humor, the sort of humor that has made Thurber so important a figure in current American writing—and drawing, needless to say—which gives the play its life. All of the second act is prodigiously funny, but it is when the shy teacher and the bright radical student get together over their whisky bottle and discuss animals and sex that you really have something wonderful. Here again Thurber is up to his favorite trick of using his animals to point out wisdom for his confused humans and, as always, it works beautifully. Incidentally, I should add parenthetically that my hero in the play is not the turning-worm teacher but the ex-football player, who returns to the campus just to see a football game and gets himself enmeshed in sex and academic combat.

At the time when he retired to Hollywood some years ago Mr. Nugent had been long accustomed to playing timid young men who turn on their oppressors. Now, after his long cinema absence, he returns to a somewhat similar role and plays it even better than it is. In an uncommonly engaging and effective characterization that he brings to "The Male Animal," I hail him for an acting, as well as a writing, achievement. Leon Ames, a good actor, is particularly good as the harassed ex-football star, and Ivan Simpson is admirably in character as the oppressed dean. Miss Ruth Matteson is excellent as the exasperated wife of the young teacher, and Miss Gene Tierney again brings freshness and charm to her small ingenue role. Robert Scott, as the college editor, is of help in the great alcoholic scene, and the other actors admirably bring "The Male Animal" makes theatregoing pleasant once again.

# "The Male Animal"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, January 10, 1940

## 'The Male Animal,' Thurber-Nugent Comedy, Opens at the Cort Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

FOR a good many years, now, James Thurber has been puzzling in print and pictures over the fascinating and rather alarming ways of the female, now suggesting that only open war will serve to deal with her and now hoping that some gentler method may suffice. But he has never been so buoyantly funny about it as he is in "The Male Animal," which he wrote with Elliott Nugent and which opened convulsively at the Cort last evening.

The ways of the female, and the bewilderment of the male in her presence, constitute only their theme in chief. They bounce happily among other subjects, treating of academic freedom and football and the Sacco-Vanzetti case; touching on the effects of alcohol on human logic and of pomposity on human affairs. But for the most part they worry with Prof. Thomas Turner, a man of letters who shares that uneasy conviction held by all literary males that what women really admire is a football player. Mr. Thurber and Mr. Nugent end by hoping this isn't so, but they don't seem any too sure about it. They are mighty funny about it, however. With sometimes rather bewildering ingenuity they plunge their professor into difficulties. During a homecoming week end they fill his house with present and former stars of the gridiron. They bring in fire-breathing

trustees who puff redly when they hear that Turner plans to read to a class that infinitely touching letter written those many years ago by Vanzetti. They arouse in Turner's mind the suspicion that his wife really loves a former halfback. They parallel their main story with the tale of Mrs. Turner's little sister, who is also torn between the literary and the brawny.

And they let their men talk. The women can hardly get a word in edgewise and are frequently reduced to tears. But the men, spinning words which are pure Thurber—all right Mr. Nugent?—down to the last comical anti-climax, work everything out. The

### 'THE MALE ANIMAL'

A comedy in three acts by James Thurber and Elliott Nugent; designed by Aline Bernstein; directed and presented at the Cort Theater on January 9, 1940, by Herman Shumlin. The cast:  
Cleota ..... Amanda Randolph  
Ellen Turner ..... Ruth Matteson  
Tommy Turner ..... Elliott Nugent  
Patricia Stanley ..... Gene Tierney  
Wally Myers ..... Don De Fore  
Dean Frederick Damon ..... Ivan Simpson  
Michael Barnes ..... Robert Scott  
Joe Ferguson ..... Leon Ames  
Mrs. Blanche Damon ..... Minna Phillips  
Ed Keller ..... Matt Briggs  
Myrtle Keller ..... Regina Wallace  
Nutsy Miller ..... Richard Beckard  
Newspaper Reporter ..... John Boruff

professor decides to be a tiger as he broods over a Scotch bottle, and achieves conclusions. A gently ironic dean goes gently mad. No Thurber dogs appear, a blot on perfection. And the plotting is a little confused at times and during the first act the play, while comical, is also straggling. But it works out fine—fine and richly funny and engagingly amiable in its masculine bewilderment.

Mr. Nugent plays the part of the professor who proves himself a sort of tiger after all, achieves a comical kind of victory in the playing. Miss Ruth Matteson acts deftly as the wife and Leon Ames and Matt Briggs splutter amusingly as men of action in a den of thought. Gene Tierney, who is so very pretty, romps in the part of the younger sister; Robert Scott, Ivan Simpson and Don De Fore add to the merriment. Amanda Randolph's comic monologue has a paragraph to itself: A mighty funny play, "The Male Animal," and a great relief after so many lean weeks.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, January 10, 1940

## "Male Animal" Starts New Year Cheerfully at the Cort

Elliott Nugent Back on the Stage After a Long Absence in Hollywood

By WILELLA WALDORF

FOR the past eight years Elliott Nugent has been in Hollywood acting, writing and directing motion pictures. Like so many film celebrities who used to be on the stage, however, he has felt the tug of the theatre again and returned to Broadway in a play written in collaboration with James Thurber, the gentleman who pens amusing things in The New Yorker and also draws pictures of ratty looking people surrounded by dozens of large, docile dogs, with wrinkled brows and a general air of dejection.

"The Male Animal," which opened at the Cort last night, is Broadway's first new play of 1940, and if a promising start means anything these days, 1940 should be a good year in the theatre. Mr. Nugent, who used to play helpless, frustrated college boys, has grown a bit older in his eight years out West, but still looks a bit youthful to be a professor of English at Midwestern University. Mr. Nugent, however, will probably look young when he is old enough to play deans, and he will always be a symbol of the ultimate triumph of the mild, intellectual type over Brute Force.

At the Cort Brute Force is represented by husky football heroes, in particular by Joe Ferguson, the All-American who put Midwestern on the map ten years ago when he and Professor Thomas Turner were in the same class and wooed the same girl. The professor married the girl, and when Joe comes back for the big game with Michigan, the old rivalry starts up again, especially as

Joe and his Pittsburgh wife have just agreed to part.

### The Professor's Dilemma

Things wouldn't have been so bad if Michael Barnes, editor of the university's literary magazine, hadn't taken it into his head to print a red-hot editorial denouncing the trustees as Fascists for dismissing sundry liberals from the faculty, and announcing that the only noble figure left was Professor Turner, who intended to read a letter written by Vanzetti aloud to his English class.

Professor Turner had merely mentioned in the course of campus conversation that he thought it might be an idea to let his students know that impressive writing has been done by non-professionals such as Lincoln Vanzetti, etc., and the whole business was of little importance one way or another until

Ed Keller, the big, bounding trustee bent on building Midwestern the largest stadium in history, blew it up into an issue and all but forced Professor Turner to stand on his principles or get out.

The hard-pressed intellectuals, represented by mild but determined Professor Turner and Editor Barnes, the idealistic undergraduate, thereupon proceed to stay home from the big game and get drunk, eventually reaching the conclusion that since tigers, leopards, lions, and even penguins, are accustomed to fighting when predatory males prowl around after their women-folk, so should the human male animal react. The result makes a rare second act climax.

### First-Rate Team; Good Coaching

The play is literate and almost continuously amusing. Herman Shumlin, the producer, has directed it all with a fine sense of pace, and the cast is excellent. Mr. Nugent is up to his old tricks as the slightly absent-minded professor who decides to assert himself, and nobody can do this sort of thing better than he. Leon Ames likewise carries great conviction as the demon footballer of yesterday who demonstrates complicated double-fake plays on the living-room floor with teacups and cutlery, and doesn't think Vanzetti's letter is half-bad after it has finally been read aloud. Matt Briggs as the stadium-boasting trustee who can't stand anything Red, or even faintly Pink, is also in the picture, and we enjoyed the work of Ivan Simpson as Dean Damon who had managed to get along without friction for forty-two years by never reading anything to his classes written later than the first half of the seventeenth century. Robert Scott, too, is excellently cast as the crusading undergraduate.

Ruth Matteson and Gene Tierney hold up the female end by looking attractive, and if Matteson is called upon to sob, snarl, and crockery and go into hysterics a bit too often, that is hardly her fault. The playwrights are better at portraying males than females. They have, however, done a neat job with the colored maid, Cleota, hilariously impersonated by Amanda Randolph.

It was Ed Keller, the sportsman-trustee, who labored a discharged professor a Red because he had once spent a vacation in Soviet Russia.

"He went to the Drama Festival," protested Hunk. "Long way to go just to see a show." Was Keller's All-American reply, scoring a touchdown.



# "The Male Animal"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, January 10, 1940

## James Thurber and Elliott Nugent's 'The Male Animal' Begins a New Theatre Year

By BROOKS ATKINSON

THINGS having been solemn enough so far in 1940, James Thurber and Elliott Nugent have had the goodness to write "The Male Animal" and to let an audience see it at the Cort, where it opened last evening. Imagine one of Mr. Thurber's limp cartoons translated into three acts of insane hubbub and you have a fair idea of the lark Mr. Nugent and he have pushed on the stage. It dismisses you from the theatre in a spirit of dazed hilarity. For the authors have treated an ordinary uproar in a professor's domestic life in the anti-heroic style of Mr. Thurber's solemn drawings and crack-brained literary style. There is some sense mixed up in it here and there in a crisis about academic freedom. But Mr. Thurber and Mr. Nugent complicate it foolishly and the tone of the acting is as board as a dray. Put "The Male Animal" down as a fantastic beast of humorous burden.

No one will accuse the authors of being literalists. They are forever backing away from a situation into bland irrelevances. For their central figure, Professor Turner of the English department is mentally intricate and physically inadequate. He is faced with two dilemmas. In the first place, an old football player, who was once sweet on the professor's wife, is back in town, and the wife is feeling unsteady. In the second place, the

trustees of the college are Red-hunting and have forbidden the professor to read to his class Vansetti's moving declaration of faith. Both situations demand summary and courageous action from a man of principle and intelligence. And the comedy of "The Male Animal" consists in Professor Turner's warring and blundering attempt to play hero.

If you want to be grave about it, you can perceive under the rumble of comedy a satire on the general helplessness of the civilized man in a world dominated by primitives. That somewhat neurasthenic satire underlies Mr. Thurber's vacuous drawings of human beings and his diffuse writing. For simple

enjoyment in the theatre, however, the extravagance of the foaling is enough—a roomful of serious people weaving a cloak of nonsense over their hysterical affairs. There has seldom been a funnier drunk scene than the one in which Professor Turner tries to reason himself into primitive action against a man three times his size, and nothing much funnier than the alarm of the former football player when an old sweetheart begins to take too much for granted. Mr. Thurber and Mr. Nugent are masters of the inconsequential sequence. Starting with nothing, they roll up "The Male Animal" into a mad brawl.

Fortunately, there is plenty of hokum in the performance. Mr. Shumlin has directed it like a civilized vaudeville. After a long time away from the theatre, Mr. Nugent has returned to play the professor with slightness of touch and gloominess of demeanor and considerable comic invention in the inebriated thought scene. Although Ruth Matteson may be overdoing the physical restlessness of the professor's distracted wife, she plays the part with intelligence and spirit. As a younger sister, Gene Tierney blazes with animation in the best performance she has yet given, and Robert Scott does particularly well as an undergraduate firebrand. Leon Ames and Matt Briggs give capital performances as the leading Philistines of the cast. Ivan Simpson is amusing as an ancient professor who deplores trouble but lives in it; and Don De Fore does as well by the healthy obtuseness of a football player of today. Like all sound comedy writers, Mr. Thurber and Mr. Nugent begin their rumpus with a comic servant and a bawdy Randolph takes care of that very handily.

Aline Bernstein has done the professor handsome in her cheerful setting where all the trouble occurs. When the trouble gets completely out of hand after the preliminary opening act, "The Male Animal" is vastly comic. There is more than meets the funny bone in this scrawled lampoon on the civilized male at bay.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, January 10, 1940

## Thurber's Satirical Humor Displayed in 'The Male Animal'

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

A GREAT deal of the uninhibited humor of James Thurber's satirical drawings enters into "The Male Animal," a pleasant play concocted by him in collaboration with Elliott Nugent, and presented last night at the Cort Theater by Herman Shumlin. Like his art, if you call it art, there isn't much to it, but it rises, now and then, to screamingly funny heights.

Mr. Thurber seems to have gone about this business of play-making quite in the manner of constructing a drawing for The New Yorker. He has in the background, a vague notion of lampooning what we hazily call "the interests." He despises stuffed shirts, and in this instance he decides to expose the peculiar type of upholstered stomach that too often dominates the boards of trustees of our smaller colleges.

This is a worthy mission, and one about which it is easy to work up a fine show of indignation. The trouble with Mr. Thurber is that when he becomes indignant, some of the richness of his humor is tossed aside, and his play halts. It is as though he said, "Now look here, it's all very well to laugh, but we have serious things to consider." And that puts a damper on the fun.

You wait a long time—through nearly an entire act, in fact—for the Thurber humor to

become evident. There is very little in that act to distinguish the characters in his college town—the temporizing professor, the student radical, the liberal English instructor, the football coach and the pompous trustee—from any of the stock characters who inhabit any other college town. They are not the unrestrained creatures of his wild imagination, previously evidenced by his caricatures.

And then we come into a second act which is as fast and flowing as his first is static. His figures become alive and say the funny things and do the ludicrous things that, being Thurber's, they should say and do. The temperature rises. The audience howls its delight. The actors on the stage put zip into their per-

formances. Everyone, on both sides of the footlights, has a good time.

After that outburst, Mr. Thurber has a rather difficult time with his play, and it ends lamely, with nothing but the remembrance of the second act to hold the interest to the end.

Mr. Thurber's hero is a young professor who has announced that he will read Vansetti's letter (after his Massachusetts conviction) in his class, as an example of the powerful writing of an untutored man. The trustees are horrified and one of them makes it his business to see that the man is fired. Coincident to the main theme is the story of the professor's wife who togs with the notion of running away with a brawny football coach, and a parallel triangle between a sweet young co-ed, a radical student and a football star. Everything, you will be glad to know, turns out for the best.

It is, as you see, a rather flimsy tale, but it is enlivened by the before-mentioned burst of humor, sparkling dialogue and brisk action of the second act, and the result is certainly not a wasted evening.

Mr. Nugent, who not only helped with the writing but who acts in the play as well, is an exceedingly clever actor and he extracted every ounce of humor from the part of the browbeaten professor, Ruth Matteson, who plays the misunderstood wife, I continue to regard as one of the brightest of our younger comedienne and she has some delightful moments. Gene Tierney's beauty adds to the pleasant picture (she bears no resemblance, I need not say, to the typical Thurber female) and her potentialities as an actress are becoming increasingly evident.

"The Male Animal," however, does not measure up to what we have a right to expect from Mr. Thurber, and in spite of its many laughs, I cannot predict for it the success due to one of his capabilities.

# "Christmas Eve"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, December 28, 1939

## 'Christmas Eve,' a Study in Psychology, Opens at Henry Miller's

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

DR. GUSTAV ECKSTEIN'S "Christmas Eve," which opened at Henry Miller's Theater last evening, is an interesting little play with individual virtues and defects. But it will not be remembered for these, or for the characters in it or for the points the author is trying to make. It will be remembered simply as the play in which a child is born on the stage, more or less in full view of the audience, and to the accompaniment of harrowing cries of anguish from the mother.

This scene is germane to the play. Dr. Eckstein did not write the play for the scene nor did Guthrie McClintic put it on to upset the squeamish. Dr. Eckstein's

purpose is to delineate the character of a sensitive girl, almost pathologically fastidious, who is engulfed in a family of hearty earthiness. He doesn't do this with any great clarity, but he does do it with a considerable measure of perception. His Julia is confusing at times, like most people, but she is real.

She is the daughter of a swaggering Irishman of uncertain temper and a gentle, hearty Polish mother. She has a brother who is given to odd enterprises. During the play he has six crates of chickens sent home C. O. D. with the notion of starting a poultry ranch in a vacant flat above. Julia is shocked by this, and

by her mother's pregnancy and by her adored father's idiosyncrasies. She is embarrassed and disturbed, at once loyal and ashamed, when her young man comes to call on Christmas Eve.

Dr. Eckstein says most of this in the first act. In the second he amplifies and confuses. I suppose it is weak technic rather than uncertain psychology which then jiggles the play to pieces. The relationships of the characters become involved and lose definition. Without ceasing to be human and interesting, Julia and the members of her family become mod-

### 'CHRISTMAS EVE'

A play in three acts by Gustav Eckstein; designed by Jo Mielainer; staged and presented at Henry Miller's Theater on December 27, 1939, by Guthrie McClintic. The cast:

|                  |                               |
|------------------|-------------------------------|
| Hanka            | Beth Merrill                  |
| Leo              | Sidney Lumet                  |
| Peter Tor        | Kent Smith                    |
| Julia            | Katherine Locke               |
| Mother McGlory   | Mildred Natwick               |
| Joe McGlory      | James Rennie                  |
| Ignace           | Michael Macready              |
| Tim              | Vincent Donehue               |
| Two Italian boys | John Dione and Peter Palmieri |
| Dr. Harris       | Robert Ross                   |
| A delivery boy   | Peter Scott                   |
| Father Flynn     | Anthony Blair                 |
| Limp             | Himself                       |

erately incomprehensible. The birth scene which follows pulls things together with a bang. It also made a few members of last evening's audience get up and go home, and without having any such inclination myself. I am afraid I knew what they meant. Julia, however, is differently affected. From the experience she learns to accept the facts of life. One of these is her young man, with whom she decides to go to Alaska, where the facts of life come in chunks.

Mr. McClintic's direction is inventive, but it never quite solves the confusing problems presented by the author's technique. Inadequacy, Katherine Locke helps by playing Julia with great sensitiveness. James Rennie does a fine, robust job as the father and Beth Merrill plays the mother with warmth and feeling. Kent Smith, as Julia's rather bewildered young man, is also excellent, as are Mildred Natwick, Robert Ross and the rest. They don't quite bring it off, but they make one feel it was worth trying.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, December 28, 1939

## Dr. Gustav Eckstein's 'Christmas Eve' Faces The Facts of Life at Henry Miller's Theatre

By BROOKS ATKINSON

NAME Dr. Gustav Eckstein a fact of life and he is ready to face it. In a spirit of clinical triumph he faces two or three with some candor in "Christmas Eve," which was acted at Henry Miller's last evening. During most of the play he studies the neurotic symptoms of an Irish girl with a father fixation, if that is the proper description of her infirmity. In the third act Dr. Eckstein winds the whole thing up with a bang by trundling a confinement case on the stage. Fortunately, Hanka McGlory does not have quintuplets, or the audience would have to remain in attendance for the rest of the night. But this department, which likes to advance one step at a time in the theatre, feels that even one birth is sufficient novelty for the present and also a queer way to spend an evening away from home. Dr. Eckstein has struck a bold note in anti-entertainment.

By vocation he is a Professor of Physiology in the University of Cincinnati and a great friend of dumb animals. By avocation he is a musician and the author of several books, the best known being "Canary." He is represented in "The Man Who Came to Dinner" as the ebullient scientist who presents the fabulous invalid with a cage of cockroaches. Now he is vividly represented with a play that none of us who saw it last evening is likely to forget.

For Dr. Eckstein's interest in human beings is strictly professional. "Christmas Eve" is the story of a helter-skelter Irish family living

in the foreign quarter of an unspecified American city. All that concerns us really is the psychopathic frame of mind of Julia McGlory. She cannot escape from her father's influence. She is being courted by a fine, strapping young man who wants to marry her and whisk her off to Alaska a-homesmaking. But everything, including her mother, who is in the perilous last stages of a confinement, drives Julia into a state of nerves. Dr. Eckstein takes care of that like a true scientist. He has the McGlory baby born on the premises and forces Julia to assist at the delivery. This fixes her up fine, and she stops backing away from the strong man of Alaska.

As a matter of fact, the McGlory family is not half bad. Shiftless, warm-hearted, hot-

tempered, squalid and generous, it flows back and forth through the good doctor's Christmas Eve without much sense of direction but with spirit. In view of the homely things in which it is interested, you are surprised that it seems so detached from the audience, like something seen at a cool distance. Probably that is because the doctor's interest in human beings is remote at heart. He sees them through a glass darkly. These are not so much characters as cases almost inextricably intertwined. And that is why the doctor makes, in this column's opinion, the basic error of supposing that anybody but a psychiatrist would be interested in his heroine. Almost any normal awain in his right senses would take to his heels after one glimpse of her in her father's presence at home.

As director of the performance and head obstetrician in the last act, Guthrie McClintic has given Dr. Eckstein an excellent cast. Katherine Locke, fresh from Ophelia, plays the tortured part of Julie brilliantly, conveying the human being as well as the symptoms. Kent Smith plays the masculine savior splendidly—a decent hero without heroics. After about twelve years away from Broadway, Beth Merrill returns as though she has never left it, and acts with warmth and strength the part of a Polish mother one step removed from peasantry. Back goes Mildred Natwick into the gray hair of grandmotherhood after a vacation in parts of her own age. She plays with spirit and comedy. James Rennie plays the swaggering part of the tyrannical parent with an little subtlety as possible. As the inscrutable physician Robert Ross gives an intelligent performance. Young Sidney Lumet, who made a lot of friends as the gallant youth in "My Heart's in the Highlands" last Spring, will make a few more by his manly performance as one of the McGlory kids.

But they are all facing one of the most exacerbating plays in modern history. Dr. Eckstein has a grim sense of humor. When the labor pains commence in the last act of "Christmas Eve," the facts of life are with him, but they bear down pretty uncomfortably on the sensibilities of the audience. Whew, what a play!

# "Christmas Eve"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, December 28, 1939

## Anti-Christmas

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

GUSTAV ECKSTEIN, the author of "Christmas Eve," must have a fine subconscious hatred for the jolly Yuletide season. His is an understandable emotion, but it certainly does interfere with the quality of his new play. Even those of us who are inclined to side with him in his cynical viewpoint must feel that he has pushed his dislike a little too far when he fills his holiday drama with the dull trivia of a boorish family fighting out its petty rows, and finds his chief excitement in the highly clinical account of the only stage childbirth in theatrical memory. Possibly he is able to see a certain wistful charm in the Irish-Polish family he is contemplating. Conceivably he even looks upon the bullying Irish father as essentially a pretty attractive character. My own belief, however, is that he finds the McGlory family as dull, stupid and generally unattractive as the rest of us are likely to and offers an account of their unappetizing Christmas eve out of his burning conviction that the holidays should be put in their place.

In producing the play, Guthrie McClintic has added a Yuletide touch of his own by using a stage that from time to time slides

back and forth, giving the more sensitive members of the audience the uncomfortable impression that they are suffering from the after-effects of too much liquid Christmas cheer. When the McGlory flat starts moving slowly but inexorably to the right, it requires steady nerves to keep from feeling slightly disturbed about your habits. The childbirth is somewhat less harrowing. Although done with great earnestness on the part of actors, author and director, the clinical episode somehow cannot avoid seeming both unnecessary and

embarrassing. It does have a part in the play, however, since the great mystery of nature somehow persuades the sensitive McGlory daughter that birth is a beautiful thing and that she should immediately marry the long-suffering mining engineer, who wants to take her to Alaska. I have never had any particular desire to go to Alaska, but I think I would be willing to make the journey to get away from that offensive Celtic father and his eccentric family. In truth, the only McGlory I liked was shaven-headed little Ignace, amusingly played by little Michael Macready, another good child actor.

Just what attracted Mr. McClintic to the script of "Christmas Eve" it would be impossible for me to tell you. Apparently the bawling McGlorys are intended as a colorful and racy group, filled with the fascinating eccentricities that are usually attractive on the stage, however annoying they would prove if encountered in actuality. It seemed to me, however, that the family emerges in "Christmas Eve" as a particularly cloddish lot, whose doings are as undramatic as anything the stage has recently offered. Somehow the McGlorys succeeded only in bringing back to my mind the really engaging family of Polish eccentrics that Robert Ardrey created some years ago for his unappreciated play called "Star-Spangled." A number of good actors strive to bring life to the new work, but, save in the case of the aforementioned Michael Macready, they are rather unsuccessful. Miss Beth Merrill is believable as the Polish mother and Kent Smith gives some life to the man on his way to Alaska; but even such excellent players as Miss Katherine Locke and Miss Mildred Natwick are not at their happiest in their efforts. "Christmas Eve" is an unseasonal comedy.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, December 28, 1939

## Christmas Eve Presented With an Excellent Cast

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

FOR the first time, as far as my knowledge extends, a birth takes place on the stage before the eyes of the audience, and the agony of delivery is contrasted with the glorification of motherhood. The action takes place in the third act of an allegory called Christmas Eve, which Guthrie McClintic presented last night at the Miller Theater.

The new play, by Gustav Eckstein, is blessed with the presence of one of the finest casts of the season, and by Mr. McClintic's realistic direction. It is simple and direct, dreadful in many of its aspects, touching in others, but it is not a happy nor a pleasant play.

There is no question in my mind but that Mr. Eckstein intended to draw a parallel between the birth of Jesus in a Bethlehem stable and the coming of a child into a lowly tenement of today. If that is so, it is to be hoped that the newly born infant will be a savior for the tormented souls in Mr. Eckstein's household, for with three or four exceptions they need regeneration.

The household consists of a Polish mother, saintlike in her love, and an Irish father, a drunken wastrel. The children share the qualities of both parents, Julia, wanting love and not knowing why nor how to get it, wanting marriage but hanging back, wanting motherhood but afraid. Into the house on Christmas Eve comes a young man, Peter Tor, very much in love with Julia, to find himself in the midst of discord, family feuds, general uproar, and finally the mystery of maternity. All this fails to shake his determination to marry Julia and it ends, I presume, with the bans arranged. It is the story of You Can't Take It With You,

minus comedy, and with a family that lacks the mad gaiety of the Sycamores. You Can't Take It With You in tragic form.

Katherine Locke and Beth Merrill carried the feminine leads with beautiful shading. Miss Merrill blended joy with dignity. Miss Locke's more temperamental role gave her an opportunity for wide ranges of emotional acting, which she accepted in the expert fashion that she demonstrated in Hamlet.

On the male side, Kent Smith was excellent in a part that afforded little opportunity for anything more than the utmost simplicity in acting, the role of the surprised young man who is thrust into the strange household without warning as to what he will find there. James Rennie gave his customary splendid performance of a roistering Irish father, and Mildred Natwick, although she had no chance to display her gifts for comedy, provided an excellent grandmother.

I regret, however, that I cannot predict for it any astonishing success.

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# "Christmas Eve"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, December 28, 1939

## "Christmas Eve"—or a Night of Fun and Childbirth at McGlory's

"Christmas Eve," play by Gustav Eckstein, produced by Guthrie McClintic at Henry Miller's Theatre, New York, Dec. 27, 1939.

★ ★★

By JOHN CHAPMAN

ONE can hazard a wild guess that when Gustav Eckstein was writing "Christmas Eve"—which opened last night at Henry Miller's—he had subconscious memories of Robert Ardrey's play about a wacky family, "Star Spangled," and of the more happily fated "You Can't Take It With You." He might have been working up a number titled "You Can't Get It All Into Three Acts but You Can Try."

Mr. Eckstein has got quite a lot, if not all, in. Much of it, concerning a Polish-Irish family's squabbles and affections, is likable; a good deal of it is confusing and the entire third act is devoted to Beth Merrill having a quick baby right on the stage, from the first labor pain to the small squall of the newest member of the McGlory tribe.

That new baby is going to have a time of it, even if Katherine Locke does make room in the crowded apartment by going to Alaska with Kent Smith. She—the infant—has a gifted, irresponsible Irish drinking man for a father; a placid, loving and handsome Polish mother, a few brothers who are no gofer

than they should be for their age, and Mildred Natwick for a sharp-tongued grandmother on the McGlory side.

### Christmas Eve Party

Things are going to be noisy enough and exciting enough without big sister Locke in the house, so it's just as well big sister is going away. For sister Locke is as annoying a hero-

ine as you'll find in a season of theatregoing.

She never did want her boy friend to come to the house and find out about her family, and here he turns up on Christmas Eve, when Father McGlory is alternately loving and quarrelsome, and gently stewed. She's a strange girl—all wound up with emotions and supersensitiveness and a conviction that Sex is awful.

It's hard to figure out what the boy friend sees in her, but he keeps mooning around and finally gets her when the delivery of the baby convinces her that marriage and the miracle of motherhood are wonderful.

### Miss Merrill Returns

Miss Locke plays, very ably, a difficult and psychologically confusing role. Mr. Smith's candid simplicity is gratifyingly helpful. James Rennie is amiable and picturesque as the head of the McGlory tribe, and a trio of youngsters — Michael Macready, Vincent Donohue and Sidney Lumet — are helpful.

Miss Merrill, returning to the stage after a dozen years, is a fine, easy-going mother the first two acts. Then she takes to her bed and groans—mercifully, not too much. Direction of two acts and delivery, by Guthrie McClintic; two-room setting, one of those good Jo Mielziner jobs; sound effects, including the new baby's cry, by Thomas J. Valentino. That man Valentino has phonograph records for everything.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, December 28, 1939

## "Christmas Eve" Staged By Guthrie McClintic

Miss Locke, Miss Merrill, Mr. Smith and Mr. Rennie in Dr. Eckstein's Play

By JOHN MASON BROWN

FOR reasons known only to himself Guthrie McClintic stood sponsor last night to a signally unfortunate drama known as "Christmas Eve" which Gustav Eckstein has written.

Just what telescope Mr. McClintic had access to in order to find virtues in the good doctor's play has not as yet been disclosed. Yet obviously a strong one, no longer in commission, must have been at his disposal. For with the naked eye, brightened by hope and focused out of respect for Mr. McClintic, it is impossible to discover either any life or cause for life in "Christmas Eve."

The blunt truth is that no drama unearthed even during the past barren weeks has ended up by seeming more pointless than this silly script about family life, young love, and childbirth which has won Mr. McClintic's interest and faith.

### Quick, Watson

When Beth Merrill, as a fertile Polish mother married to a worthless Irishman, has crooned her last birth pang and been delivered in full view of the audiences of a crying

doll, what have we at the Henry Miller's in addition to a bad time? The answer is precious little; really, less than that. Because after their fair-to-middling first act both Mr. McClintic and Dr. Eckstein are in a fumbling mood.

The doctor goes to much literary effort to establish his many characters and their complicated relationships. He would have us know the horrors of a bullying father, understand the sweetness of the Polish mother, and appre-

ciate how slow a young miner, headed for Alaska, is in courting the McGlory's unattractive daughter. This is not all. Apparently the doctor thinks he is also singing a hymn to motherhood. He even asks to join in the chorus. When, however, he attempts to illustrate his point by showing how the backward daughter in his crowded household is awakened to the glories of possible motherhood by watching the glorious pains suffered by her own mother in an autumnal childbirth, why then Dr. Eckstein makes any response, choral or otherwise, to his hymn difficult, if not impossible.

The major trouble with "Christmas Eve," aside from the fact that it proves to be both incredible and laughable, is that almost from start to finish it has a bogus literary ring to it. It must claim more than the stamp of bad Eckstein upon it. It also keeps sounding like very bad Dickens and even worse Odets. It is all echo, and a poor echo at that, and very little truth.

### No Excuse

Mr. McClintic's contribution is not much more helpful than the good doctor's. He does not aid matters by asking Mr. Mielziner to send his otherwise satisfactory settings jockeying back and forth from time to time on a scenic shuttle.

Kent Smith is intelligent and reliable as the young miner. Beth Merrill does a nice job in her earlier and still vertical episodes as the Polish mother. And James Rennie has himself a barbecue swaggering and burlesque as the Irish father. But Katherine Locke never explains Mr. Smith's fondness for her. Her Ophelia refuses to be drowned—Miss Locke acts the daughter as if at any moment she were going to reach for her rosemary and fennel and burst into a mad song. Even Mildred Natwick is not up to her usual standard in a small bit as the Irish grandmother.

Indeed, my own favorite in Mr. McClintic's cast is young Master Michael Macready, who smiles charmingly and meets the harsh toroidal demands of his part with courage, even if he has little to say. Come to think of it, he has much more to say for himself than can be said either for Dr. Eckstein's play or for Mr. McClintic's decision to produce it.

# "Kindred"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, December 27, 1939

## Heritage

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IN HIS new play Paul Vincent Carroll is trying to tell us that the artist must inherit the earth if it is to be saved from the greedy publican. To emphasize this grafting moral he shows his artistic creators as scoundrels and poltroons, and his tradesmen and politicians as fairly amiable fellows. I think that this curious propensity for attempting to say one thing and ending by unwittingly saying just the opposite is the measure of his failure in "Kindred." For the new work by the brilliant author of those delightful dramas, "Shadow and Substance" and "The White Steed," is, I must say with deep regret, a decided failure, both in its thinking and in its writing, and it only goes to point out the unhappy truth that even the most talented playwrights must fall down on us from time to time. Although it is a pleasure to welcome back to our midst two such expert Irish actors as Barry Fitzgerald and Arthur Shields, it is not comforting to have Paul Vincent Carroll give us a "Kindred."

It is Mr. Carroll's thesis that the artists of this world and the hereafter form a spiritual brotherhood which is waiting for that moment in the future when God will be released from His thralldom to the forces of evil, the creative spirits will come into their own, and the demons of cruelty, ignorance, ugliness and false patriotism will be overthrown. Until that great day arrives it is the duty of those possessing the creative spirit to keep alive the seed of the artist and to await in dark and

lonely grandeur the coming of the new dispensation. The women, Mr. Carroll says rather ungallantly, are not important in this process of carrying on the tradition of this mystic brotherhood. Any woman, in fact, will do, since her task is merely a biological one and is only a detail in the process of maintaining the ranks of the elect. The artist, he adds, may seem a lonely and unhappy man, but he is not really alone, since he is likely to be visited by the ghosts of his ancestors at any moment of crisis. This, at least, is apparently what the new play says in its speeches.

As I have said, however, there is often a wide divergence between what Mr. Carroll's play says and does. In the prologue, for example, his ghosts and his artist proclaim with Irish eloquence that the woman is only a bio-

logical detail in the kinship of the creative spirit. Yet during the rest of the play it is a woman who is chief responsible for carrying the mystic banner of the artist, comforting the unhappy heir of a mad painter in his difficult journey through life, giving some of the spirit of the artist to her confused son and in general acting as a more valuable advocate for Mr. Carroll's creative cult than the distraught son of the dead painter, who is by birth the true carrier of the torch. The play seems likewise to offer the painter and his son as the bright hopes of the future, and the grocer, who is the husband of its heroine, as the representative of current degradation. Yet it is difficult to sit through "Kindred" without feeling that the future of the world would rest safer in the hands of the grocer than of the artists. Hitler, too, fancies himself as an artist.

As in all of Mr. Carroll's plays, there is in "Kindred" much eloquence, a bit of excellent humor and a gift for racy characterization. There is an earnestness about it that is frequently impressive, and obviously it is the work of a playwright who possesses the valuable qualities of dignity and fervor. You will find at least two fine performances in it, too. That invariably brilliant comedian, Barry Fitzgerald, is once more racily delightful, although he is far too engaging in the role of the grocer to serve as Mr. Carroll's horrible extenuation. As the wandering violinist, the puzzled, lost son of the painter, that good actor, Arthur Shields, offers a consistently fine portrait of a role that seems as confused as the play. Miss Aline MacMahon gives dignity and genuine feeling to the part of the wife and, in the small role of a biological detail in Mr. Carroll's argument, Miss Wauna Paul is helpful. The strange character of the mad painter in the prologue reveals the expert Wallace Ford in one of his less happy roles. "Kindred" must be set down as a disappointment.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, December 27, 1939

## "Kindred" Is a Poet's Plea for Idealism and a World Reformed

"Kindred," drama by Paul Vincent Carroll. Produced by Edward Choate and Arthur Shields at Maxine Elliott's Theatre, New York, Dec. 26, 1939.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

IT IS another of those dreamers' plays, this "Kindred" which Edward Choate and Arthur Shields produced at Maxine Elliott's Theatre last night. It is Paul Vincent Carroll's plea for a reorganized world in which those of a spiritual kindred shall take over the rule of the world.

There is not great hope for it as a commercial venture. I fear. Idealism is a fine theme to write and talk about, but there isn't much sale for it in the market places of Main Street.

Some politicians may justify selfishness and greed, and stand for the sponsorship of the money changers, but the people are used to them and, according to Mr. Carroll's confession, will probably go on accepting them for many generations to come.

I think I glimpsed the Alfred Smiths and the Joseph Kennedys in last night's audience. They, too, looked a little hopeless at the play's close.

### From the Past

"Kindred" is the lightly fantastic story of a mad artist whose ancestors came to him after he had refused to marry the lovely lady of his dreams because he did not want to perpetuate his line.

It was the duty, insisted the ghostly

callers, of all creative artists to carry on. The materialists had plunged the world into war for the second time in twenty-five years. It was time for the idealists and the creators of beauty to take over.

So the mad artist seduced his maid servant. When he heard she was with child he killed himself.

There is a lapse of twenty-five years after the prologue. This brings the play back to the present, to the illegitimate son of the dead artist and the serving maid, and the idealized son of the fine woman he had cast aside and the little green grocer she had married.

There is the clash then between the grocer's son, who is urged to give up school-teaching and go into politics, backed by the money of the girl who wants to marry him, and the dreaming fiddler, who carries on the fight for truth and the ascendancy of the spiritually reclaimed.

"Kindred," unhappily, becomes increasingly foggy as it proceeds. There is beauty of text, as there is in all that Mr. Carroll writes. There is beauty of thought and tenderness in the relationships of the kindred. There is even sanity in his reasoning and a fine idealistic glow.

### Crusaders Must Fight

But there is also an admission of defeat before the battle lines are fairly drawn, and the idealistic crusaders cannot admit defeat and hope for dramatic results.

The acting is generally excellent. Aline MacMahon, one of the fine actresses of this day, is movingly sympathetic as the spiritual mother of two sons, and the physical mother of one.

Arthur Shields plays the wild lad of the road with authentic understanding and Harry Young is manly and believable as the grocer's offspring.

Barry Fitzgerald gathers a laugh or two as the grocer, and is a great help to the evening. Wallace Ford does what he can for the mad poet and Thomas Findlay is upstanding in the name of the politicians. Robert Edmond Jones has set the play simply and Mr. Fields has directed it in the same mood.

# "Kindred"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, December 27, 1939

## Paul Vincent Carroll's 'Kindred' Opens at Maxine Elliott's Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

PAUL VINCENT CARROLL is, like other playwrights of significance, a man seeking assurance in a turbulent world, and twice his search has led him to write with beauty and clarity of religious matters. His search is continued in "Kindred," which opened last evening at Maxine Elliott's, but now it seems to me it has led him up a blind and fog-choked alley. The fog is formed of Mr. Carroll's words, and of clouded mysticism, and the author is groping in it.

Philosophically, he is engaged in a mystic dedication of art. His kindred are of the free masonry of the creative. Insatiably vocal, the characters of his admiration pour contempt upon lesser men. They hurl dark words at those who live on "Main Street," and the term is Mr. Carroll's as it was once Sinclair Lewis's. The "dark saints" rule the world and rule it badly, and nothing good will come of anything until the artists bring back the old songs and paint, I suppose, the old pictures, and awaken the "beauty and vision" in mankind.

To give form to these abstractions, Mr. Carroll tells a story. He tells of an Irish woman who loved an artist, and was rejected by him because he felt his love to be a contamination. But he was visited by ghosts of his creative ancestors, and told that he must continue the breed. So he had a son by a char-girl and then, in the midst of a peculiarly Irish

oration, killed himself. The woman who loved him married a green grocer in Altmoran and had a son also. But the artist's child was her spiritual son and after years he returned as a wandering musician. He stirred everybody up dreadfully with tumbling words. Almost he persuaded the grocer's son to abandon a career in politics, because the struggle of foolish, stupid people to govern themselves is, Mr. Carroll clearly feels, beneath the notice of the artist.

I have probably not concealed that I object to the author's doctrine with considerable violence; that it seems to me at bottom intolerably smug. Obviously, any author has a right to his convictions, even if reviewers think

### 'KINDRED'

A play in a prologue and two acts by Paul Vincent Carroll; directed and designed by Robert Edmond Jones; presented at Maxine Elliott's Theater on December 26, 1939, by Edward Choate and Arthur Shields. The cast:  
Mary Griffin.....Aline MacMahon  
Dermot O'Regan.....Wallace Ford  
Primrose Carr.....Wanna Paul  
"Roderick O'Regan".....Charles Kennedy  
"Jerome O'Regan".....Hale Norcross  
Robert Fenet.....Barry Fitzgerald  
J. K. Keefe.....Thomas Findlay  
Mary Fenet.....Aline MacMahon  
Michael Fenet.....Harry Young  
Agnes Keefe.....Halla Stoddard  
Alice.....Aldeen O'Connor  
Dermot O'Regan.....Arthur Shields  
Sergt. Hannigan.....Byron Russell

them wrong-headed. But Mr. Carroll has this time voiced his in drama almost always vaporous. Sometimes, since he is an observer of discernment, he has got living, kicking characters to do it. But for the most part the characters are cloudy, too. His artists, particularly, are vague as they are glib. There are occasional moments of intensity in the dialogue, but many more which are only fine talk, full of sound and facility and easy eloquence. Nor, in spite of the direction of Robert Edmond Jones, is the acting always what it might be. Aline MacMahon acts the artist's role with grave dignity, but in the part of the artist Wallace Ford acts showily on the surface. Barry Fitzgerald is a long chackle of delight as always, but Arthur Shields gives little depth to the crucial part of the artist's son. Harry Young, Halla Stoddard, Aldeen O'Connor, Thomas Findlay and the rest do only well enough.

It is all, except for Miss MacMahon and Mr. Fitzgerald, pretty disappointing.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, December 27, 1939

## Paul Vincent Carroll's 'Kindred' a Defense of the Artist in a Scheming World

By BROOKS ATKINSON

HAVING finished with church politics for the moment, Paul Vincent Carroll is now defending the artist against a scheming world in "Kindred," which was acted at Maxine Elliott's last evening. Although he has left the ecclesiastical environment of "Shadow and Substance" and "The White Steed," he is still in a religious frame of mind. In the modern world the artist represents the ideal of the pure in heart to him. But perhaps Mr. Carroll needs the structure of the church to give his arguments a solid footing. For the unpleasant fact seems to be that "Kindred" is a maudlin play, with phantoms for characters and a will-o'-the-wisp for story and nothing to pin it down to reality. Except for the acting of Barry Fitzgerald, Aline MacMahon and Arthur Shields it is pretty much a waste of words and energy.

Unless this courier misunderstands him, Mr. Carroll is declaring that the artist is the free, uncorrupted spirit, and that the world poisons every one who touches it. In a turgid prologue he goes to considerable trouble to lure a mad artist into having a son by an ignorant slut, instead of by the woman he loves. In the two acts of the main play he keeps the son bashing

his head against the civil world of trade and politics. The mad son, notable chiefly for his violin playing, nearly persuades a grocer's son not to stand for Parliament from a small town on the Irish coast. But it is not that easy to purify the world at one fell stroke. The grocer's son does stand for Parliament, and the mad son is arrested by the local constabulary for assaulting the grocer in a fit of rage.

If this sounds a trifle more insane than most stories in the theatre, Mr. Carroll must share

in the blame. Frankly, this bewildered department does not know what Mr. Carroll is driving at. He has strange, mystical ideas about women that complicate simple situations and generate wild words. If he is offering the strolling violin-player as a prophet in a wicked world, all the rest of us can do is to hope to be spared prophets or salvationists on this side of Heaven. Mr. Carroll's portrait of the covetous little world of shop-keepers and politicians is forbidding enough. But it is infinitely more livable than the smug, belligerent, intolerant cosmos of the artist. Mr. Carroll is tilting ferociously at all of the windmills in sight. Virtue could hardly be more odious or complex than this fulmination in praise of it.

The incertate playgoer can at least be grateful for some of the acting. Miss MacMahon, who has not been seen on a local stage for eight years, plays with the calm compassion of the mother of all women. Particularly in the prologue, it is a strange job, but Miss MacMahon quietly dominates it with considerable unaffected beauty. Fortunately, Barry Fitzgerald is also on hand to apply his tight, wizened comedy style to the part of footling green grocer. It is inspired comedy, good for the play that needs it and wonderfully precious to a tormented theatregoer. His brother, Arthur Shields, plays the prophet of virtue with the wildness that Mr. Carroll has written into it, but also with the saving grace of good acting in the more tolerable moments. Wallace Ford cannot make much out of the raving artist in the prologue; nor can any of the actors, sketchily directed by Robert Edmond Jones, achieve much brilliance in Mr. Carroll's war on inquiry.

No one could make much out of "Kindred," including this battered seeker after the truth of Mr. Carroll's message.



# "Kindred"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, December 27, 1939

## Paul Vincent Carroll's

### "Kindred" Is Produced

Aline MacMahon, Barry Fitzgerald and Arthur Shields  
in a New Allegory

By JOHN MASON BROWN

NO DOUBT Paul Vincent Carroll is entitled to "Kindred." Any man able to write such plays as "Shadow and Substance" and "The White Steed" must be forgiven if, and when, he turns out even such a script as the added one that reached Maxine Elliott's last night.

The kindest way to look at it is to maintain Mr. Carroll had it coming to him. This may be pretty hard on all the rest of us who had it coming to us, too. But a momentary slip from grace should not involve a dislocated hope. A failure such as this has to be expected. Its inevitability in the career of a dramatist of Mr. Carroll's standing is the tragic truth of high endeavor.

Certainly in "Kindred" Mr. Carroll is innocent of any charge of not trying. The truth is he has tried too hard. In doing so the only sin he has committed is reaching for the moon with a bent spoon. It is impossible not to admire him for wanting to scoop it up at all. But such admiration is only in the abstract. What one is forced at almost every moment to deplore is his lamentable choice of weapons.

#### Wearing Out the Green

Mr. Carroll is a man who in a mad world still believes in the artist's vision. He thinks

our troubles would be lessened if only the uncompromising spirit of the artist rather than the toadying insincerities of the politician could dominate. Unfortunately to prove his point (which is a simple one that can be guessed at even during the fog which settles on his prologue), he tells a very sleepy and stupid story about an Irish mother who is torn between an instinctive fondness for the political son she has borne and her love for the half-crazed violinist who might have been her child.

Although Mr. Carroll admits the time has not yet come for his vision of the artist-world to be materialized, and describes God as still

dreaming, what Mr. Carroll has himself turned out must be set down as more of a nightmare than a dream. Certainly his new play is a continuation of the faults rather than virtues of his previous efforts. The obscurities in them which were provocatively dramatized or gaily disguised are at present shamelessly exposed. The result is that his symbols no longer tinkle. They are muffled from curtain-rites to curtain-fall; muffled in terms of much gaudy writing, of reams of clumsy dramaturgy, of pages of childish thinking; yes, and even of some dead relatives who, full of dynastic advice, insist upon returning to describe themselves as beachcombers in the next world.

At moments Mr. Carroll shows he has not replaced entirely his Gaelic gift for phrases and comedy. For the most part, however, his Irish cadences and images have a tricky ring to them which makes them sound not as if they were written by one of Synge's inheritors but as if they were lifted from Mr. Nathan's forthcoming "Encyclopedia of the Theatre" and its implied parody of Celtic dialogue. Hoping to the contrary, one is compelled to suspect as one listens to his platitudes, in which so few silver threads lighten the dark lanes of his thinking, that New York has not been good for the erstwhile school teacher.

Robert Edmond Jones, the program insists, has set and directed "Kindred," and I, for one, am grateful to the program for its information. Barry Fitzgerald, who is always a joy, adds character and humor to the thankless part of the publican who is the politician's father. Arthur Shields does what any one could do (which is next to nothing) as the "Clutie John" musician. Wallace Ford is almost as bad as the artist of the prologue as he was good as George in "Of Mice and Men." And Halla Stoddard is unhappily cast as a scheming Celtic laughter. But Aline MacMahon, although not at home vocally in the Irish play, returns to the stage to bring a lovely quality, a kind of radiant stillness, and a poignant simplicity, backed by extremely telling pantomime, to her playing of the mother.

Even so, "Kindred" remains intellectually and dramatically a founding I am afraid no one will want to claim on the doorstep of Maxine Elliott's.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, December 27, 1939

## Carroll's Play, Kindred, Opens at Elliott Theater

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

AFTER Shadow and Substance, which was a play about the Irish church, and The White Steed, which was a play about the Irish clergy, certain well-intentioned friends of Paul Vincent Carroll expressed the wish that he would forget the theme upon which he had built two successes, and try his hand at something with a more universal appeal.

Mr. Carroll pleasantly acceded to their wishes, and today I wish he hadn't, for his Kindred, which had its premiere last night at the Maxine Elliott Theater, is, even to these sympathetic ears and eyes, just so much blather.

There was sufficient mysticism in Shadow and Substance to satisfy the most abnormal craving for the abstruse in drama. The White Steed had less spirituality, but its homely characterizations were common to all humanity and all ears. Kindred is a mixture of confused philosophy, dark spirits, unwholesome fears and language that sounds like a burlesque of Mr. Carroll's fine Irish style.

What Mr. Carroll intends to prove if anything is still a dark secret. He draws pictures of men who are daft and tries to argue that they are the only sane ones. He is dissatisfied with the social and political aspects of life, and he strangely hints that the evils growing out of the inherent pettiness of mankind can be cured by flouting rather than correcting the law. He tries to say that brotherly love is the only instrument that can possibly wipe out injustice, yet he makes the protagonist of

Kindred, Dermot O'Regan, a man steeped in hatred, suspicion and intolerance of everything save his own crooked point of view.

There are some particularly unpleasant ghosts in Kindred, appearing, or rather filling silently into the gloom of the stage at various intervals, their purpose being to hold their earth-bound relative steady on the course they have mapped out for him. One of them is a man who has killed his wife because he hated the wart on her nose. Another is one who committed suicide. A third is Dermot's father, also a suicide, who had the forethought to create his son, with the aid of an obliging and ignorant lump of a servant girl, in order to perpetuate the strange and rebellious blood. And, peculiarly enough, we hear these ghosts justifying their crimes with the argument that they were destroying ugliness, or fighting for beauty or, *mirabile dictis*, to protect the Al-

mighty from the bad counsellors who had enchained him.

The play opens with a prologue, which is largely concerned with protestations of love between the elder Dermot O'Regan, a mad artist, and Mary Griffin, a young woman endowed with a strong mystic sense, with the appearance of the ghosts, and with Dermot's seduction of his servant, Primrose. It continues, through two acts, with the conflict between the son of this match, and Mary Griffin's son by her commonplace, green-grocer husband. It brings Mary Griffin's son almost to the point of renouncing a life as a potential politician in order to continue a teaching career, and it ends with Dermot carted off to jail for a murderous assault on the green-grocer, and with Mary's son turning back to the slime of politics.

If there is unusual confusion in the play, there is an equal amount of it in the mixed casting of it. The real Irish players, such as good old Barry Fitzgerald with his deft, human touch, or his brother, Arthur Shields, who has a deep and sincere passion for his art—and a great deal of experience in it as well—were excellently equipped to give Mr. Carroll's words as much understanding as is humanly possible.

But, for the *luvu* God, as Barry would say, why Wallace Ford was ever cast to play the part of the mad Irish painter is beyond me. He is entirely out of his hearty American field, and the result is one of the largest slices of ham of the season. The same complaint goes for Miss Halla Stoddard, who did a much better job of modeling a pair of black lace panties in I Know What I Like, earlier this season, than she does as the ambitious daughter of an Irish lawyer.

Aline MacMahon played the role of Mary Griffin appealingly and with welcome restraint, although she accomplished another Irish miracle by keeping her age stationary throughout the 30 years of the play.

Mr. Carroll is much more convincing in his dealings with Canons than with ghosts.

# "When We Are Married"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, December 26, 1939

## A Priestley Comedy at the Lyceum

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THE singularly tepid flirtation which J. B. Priestley is conducting with the theater was continued at the Lyceum last evening. There, taking advantage of this season of good will, Robert Henderson offered "When We Are Married," a charade which Mr. Priestley must have pasted together in a moment of unusual absent-mindedness and presumably for a benefit being put on by the village grange. Its appearance on Broadway is obviously the result of an error.

It is not concerned with the mystery of time, the theme of Mr. Priestley's serious devotion. No such weighty matters troubled our author's mind as he composed

"When We Are Married." He merely thought it would be funny if he told a story of three middle-aged couples who discovered on their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary that they had never legally been married. A little comedy might be run up on that foundation, Mr. Priestley concluded, and so he ran up a little comedy.

It is not, I think, a really excruciating idea. Even if it works out, you haven't got a whole lot. And there is, as "When We Are Married" abundantly proves, no assurance

that it will work out at all. There is always the nasty risk that, having once established your situation, you will be able to think of no plausibly comical development. You are then reduced to hurrying your characters around aimlessly through three acts, in the faint hope that the audience will confuse restlessness with excitement.

This is what Mr. Priestley has done, and it hasn't worked. The play stands in one

### 'WHEN WE ARE MARRIED'

A comedy in three acts by J. B. Priestley; setting by Karlle Amend; staged and presented at the Lyceum Theater on December 25, 1939, by Robert Henderson.

The cast:  
 Ruby Birtle..... Sally O'Neill  
 Gerald Forbes..... Winston O'Keefe  
 Mrs. Northrup..... Alison Skipworth  
 Nancy Hofmes..... Jane Sterling  
 Fred Dyson..... Lee Parry  
 Henry Ormouroyd..... J. C. Nugent  
 Alderman Joseph Helliwell..... Tom Powers  
 Maria Helliwell..... Alice Fleming  
 Councillor Albert Parker..... A. P. Kaye  
 Annie Parker..... Estelle Winwood  
 Herbert Soppitt..... Philip Tonge  
 Clara Soppitt..... Ann Andrews  
 Lottie Grady..... Leona Powers  
 Rev. Clement Mercer..... Henry Mowbray

place and hops up and down. The plotting is all odds and ends and incoherence. The efforts at comedy are abashingly amateurish and the final result is that everybody looks and feels a little foolish. The situation develops to develop, nothing interesting happens to any of the characters and a lot of actors are put in bad spots.

Several excellent players are among the victims of Mr. Priestley's hapless writing. Among them are Alison Skipworth, J. C. Nugent, Tom Powers, A. P. Kaye, Estelle Winwood, Philip Tonge and Ann Andrews, none of whom deserves what has happened to them. I don't know that the rest of us do, either.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, December 26, 1939

## J. B. Priestley's 'When We Are Married' Put on With Estelle Winwood and Alison Skipworth

By BROOKS ATKINSON

WHEN Mr. Priestley was most companionable in the pages of "The Good Companions" he wrote affectionately about an obscure concert troupe that toured the byways of England with a bit of entertainment. His newest play, "When We Are Married," which was acted at the Lyceum last evening, would have been perfect for a provincial traveling company. Absenting himself from time theories, at least for the moment, Mr. Priestley has written a rambling, old-fashioned piece of theatre hocus-pocus about three seasoned couples who suspect that they are not legally married. Casually scribbled, it is acted in the same rough-and-ready spirit by an oddly assembled cast that includes Estelle Winwood, Alison Skipworth, Ann Andrews, J. C. Nugent and Tom Powers. Many people in the audience seemed to be thoroughly enjoying the play and themselves on Christmas night. To this department "When We Are Married" is not up to Mr. Priestley's standard.

In the interests of make-believe Mr. Priestley sets his comedy thirty years ago in a small town in the north of England. Three couples have met to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the day when some half-forgotten parson married them. Before the celebration is really started the three men discover that the parson had not

been properly qualified to perform marriages at that time. Apparently, all three of the couples have been living in sin. During the rest of the evening Mr. Priestley humorously discloses the effect this sensational news has on those six individuals. It depresses some of them; bucks some of them up, but alarms their sense of respectability. After Mr. Priestley has played puss-in-the-corner with a comic idea for the necessary three acts he finds a way to set everything to rights again and pull down the curtain.

Mr. Priestley has long contended that the theatre need not wear full dress all the

time, but should also lounge around the house in carpet slippers. He believes that playing means play. "When We Are Married" is a case in point. Offered as an evening's lark, it tumbles around the stage like an improvisation, dropping the most decisive character in the first act as soon as the plot no longer needs him; sweeping everything aside to give the stage to a tipsy photographer in the second act and finding its fun wherever it can find it. There are some amusing lines now and then. When the wife of the most pompous man in the cast upbraids him for having been dull and dreary for a quarter of a century, he replies with some surprise, "Really? I always seemed to me to be an exciting sort of fellow."

As director, Robert Henderson shares Mr. Priestley's faith in barn-storming. He has rounded up a cast of individualists and egged them on, willing for the best man to win in the race to the final curtain. Alison Skipworth plays the part of a belligerent charwoman with a kind of bullying aggressiveness—very amusingly at times. J. C. Nugent, a funny vaudevillian, totters and gulps through the part of the befuddled photographer. Estelle Winwood plays one of the unmarried wives with sly and devious humor, and Ann Andrews plays another with wit. Leona Powers barges in as a provincial fancy woman and swaggers around at random. Tom Powers, A. P. Kaye and Philip Tonge handle the husbands as broad characters. Winston O'Keefe plays the purely utilitarian part of the messenger of bad tidings with the lucidity of a singularly clear-headed actor.

The performance is as broad as a vaudeville, actors jostling actors in the highest good nature. Amusing in spots, the performance is as chaotic as a Christmas Night farce. The play is of equal quality. Mr. Priestley nods on Goddahl.

# "When We Are Married"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, December 26, 1939

## Priestley's New Comedy Opens

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

J. B. PRIESTLEY lays a heavy Yorkshire hand on the comedy of married life in his latest dramatic effort, *When We Are Married*, and the result is a play second in triviality only to last week's British offering, *Billy Draws a Horse*.

There are some caperings in the new play, which opened last night at the Lyceum Theater, but all the good efforts of an excellent cast failed to make them anything more than elephantine in manner. If there is anything to be grateful for, other than the fleeting appearances of Alison Skipworth, J. C. Nugent and Estelle Winwood, it is that Mr. Priestley apparently has forsaken his exploration of the philosophy of time and is turning his thoughts earthward. Even this piece, slight as it is, bears more relation to human events than his last two American presentations.

It is easy to relate the story of *When We Are Married*. Three couples, celebrating their silver wedding anniversary, discover that they are not and never have been married. The clergyman who performed the ceremony, it seems was not empowered to conduct the service. Upon this discovery they unburden themselves of all the disagreeable thoughts that have been smouldering in their minds during their conjugal life. The henpecked husband asserts his rights. The pompous, egotistic pinch-penny councillor is exposed for what he is by his erstwhile meek wife. The "steady" successful alderman is shown to be a would-be Lothario on his spare time.

In the third act another discovery is made, as you would expect, that the marriages are legal after all, because under the old law

only the registrar's name on the certificate was necessary to validate a wedding, and the three couples are forced to go on living with each other. And a very dull life they must have had henceforth.

When *We Are Married* has amusing moments, but they nearly always come in the interpolated vaudeville surrounding such incidents as a drunken colloquy between Mr. Nugent, as a photographer, and Sally O'Neill, as a talkative maid. (Incidentally, no British play would be a British play without a talkative maid.) Or Miss Winwood making up her flutery mind to discard her mate and go on the spree for which she has yearned all these years. Or Miss Skipworth's notable entrances and exits as a charlady. Unfortunately for Mr. Priestley, whenever these bits of vaudeville are introduced the play is at once forgotten. And fortunately for the audience, they are introduced at sufficient intervals to prevent slumber.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, December 26, 1939

## Really, Mr. Priestley!

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

MR. PRIESTLEY, who doesn't care much for American dramatic critics, isn't going to be much fonder of them when he reads the reviews of "*When We Are Married*." In his new play the combative Briton drops his devious delvings into the metaphysics of time to tell us a little whimsy concerning some bemused Englishmen of thirty years ago, and I must say that he is pretty clumsy about it. Usually Mr. Priestley is reasonably deft in his stage narratives, even when getting himself bogged down in his philosophical theories, but now, with a straightaway anecdote to dramatize, he grows hopelessly confused and feebly antic until his play becomes as weak and fatuous as a comedy as England has sent us in many a hapless day. Although a number of good actors appear in it, "*When We Are Married*" seems so helpless a little work that one hates to speak too cruelly of it, but not even what is left of the Christmas spirit could make one say that it was worth bothering about. Put it down as just another British mishap.

This time Mr. Priestley is telling us the one about the three couples who discover, just as they are getting ready to celebrate their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, that, for some reason or other, their marriages were not legal. You can just about picture what is going to happen from that moment. The most downtrodden of the husbands and the most forlorn of the wives rebel against their tyrannical spouses and have a little flirtation. The most pompous of the husbands is put in his place, and a barmaid comes to claim the husband who has often told her that he would marry her if he were not already wed. An ingenuo marries a juvenile. Then, just about certain time, an extraneous character, who has been wandering about the stage with considerable vagueness, explains that the confused couples were really legally married all the time. You could anticipate it all, but you

could hardly have imagined how many feeble jests and antique comedy episodes Mr. Priestley has loaded onto his already creaking narrative. Never trust an Englishman with a whimsy, is my motto.

A number of capable actors have been persuaded to appear in this unfortunate inanity. Miss Ann Andrews and Miss Estelle Winwood play two of the wives pleasantly. Philip Tonge is the most likable of the husbands. A. E. Kaye is the most blustering, and Tom Powers is the most kittenish. Miss Alison Skipworth plays a disreputable serving woman with her customary relish, and J. C. Nugent battles valiantly with a curiously inept comedy role. Miss Lottie Powers comes on gallantly as a compassionate barmaid, and Miss Jane Sterling is an agreeable ingenuo. All of them labor as bravely as possible, but Mr. Priestley has made their most earnest endeavors useless by giving his comedy an air of all-pervading dullness and comic ineptitude that makes his play one of the dullest of the season. If all of this makes the somewhat choleric dramatist angry at us all over again, then I can only tell him that we are not altogether pleased with him, either. After all, he really is an abler man than "*When We Are Married*" would indicate.

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# "When We Are Married"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, December 26, 1939

## 'When We're Married' a Yorkshire Pudding Without Seasoning

"When We Are Married," comedy by J. B. Priestley. Produced by Robert Henderson at the Lyceum Theatre, New York, Dec. 25, 1939.

★+

By BURNS MANTLE

I THINK if I were a friend of J. B. Priestley, the English dramatist, I should want to get out this morning and picket the Lyceum theatre with a banner reading: "This Production Unfair to Priestley."

The play, "When We Are Married," which was done there last night, would be pretty poor stuff, even with a company of superior British comedians trained in the playing of its Yorkshire locals.

With a nondescript assortment of British and American actors struggling with it in a sadly cast and carelessly directed production it becomes quite impossible.

### Can't Forgive All

Priestley, however, is not to be forgiven all on that score. About all he had to start with was an amusing situation. Six smug country couples who had been married on the same day twenty-five years before are gathered for a silver anniversary celebration.

Suddenly it is discovered by the organist of the village church, against whom they are about to lay charges of carrying on with the village girls, that the curate who had married the celebrants was really unauthorized to do so at the time of the ceremony.

The sudden revelation that they have been even technically living in sin for a quarter century, and that their issue is nameless, throws the six into a dither that should provide fun.

### Bad Investment

It doesn't. It is a stupid affair with little laughter and less logic. Unworthy of support, I should say, even at popular prices.

Curiously these are exciting names in the cast. Names like those of Ann Andrews and Leona Powers, Estelle Winwood and J. C. Nugent, Allison Skipworth and Tom Powers, A. F. Kaye, Henry Mowbray and Philip Tonge.

But, outside Andrews and Skipworth and Leona Powers, these are not trained nor dependable comedians. Their forte is drama, their lighter bent is the romantic comedy of commerce.

Nugent is a good comedian if he has direction. Left on his own he can be quite terrible, as he was last night. And if someone doesn't immediately throttle a misdirected youngster named Sally O'Neill her career is about to be ruined at its promising inception.

Two who played straight, Winston O'Keefe and Jane Sterling, were the lucky ones.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, December 26, 1939

## "When We Are Married" Arrives at the Lyceum

J. B. Priestley's Yorkshire Comedy Presented by a Well Known Company

By WILLELLA WALDORF

BROADWAY'S Christmas night opening was "When We Are Married," a Yorkshire prank by J. B. Priestley, presented by an astonishingly well-known company of actors at the Lyceum. Daniel Frohman sat in the fifth row, and the first-nighters also included some of the players from shows which decided not to give Christmas night performances, among them Tallulah Bankhead.

Since J. B. Priestley suddenly began to take time off from his novels a few years ago for a fling at the stage, he has turned out a remarkable number of plays, not all of which have reached America. "When We Are Married" is laid in the town

of Cleckleywey in the North of England, which is its author's native heath—he was born in Bradford—and we shouldn't be surprised to hear that it was originally turned out for a "do" at the local Chapel.

With a twinkle in his eye and a gurgle in his throat, Mr. Priestley asks his audience to imagine what would happen if three respectable couples got together at Alderman Helliwel's house to celebrate their silver wedding anniversary, only to discover that,

owing to a technicality, they were never married at all, had, in fact, been living in sin for twenty-five years! The young organist at the Chapel, who makes the discovery, is willing to say nothing whatever about it, but it happens Mrs. Northrup, the Helliwel's cook, is listening at the door, and proceeds to carry the glad news post-haste to the local "pub."

In no time two husbands and one wife begin in a genteel, Yorkshire way, to kick over the traces, and in a desperate effort to keep the stew boiling, the author adds a tipsy photographer from the town's leading newspaper, a racy female who once met the husbands in Blackpool, and a pert Irish maid to the ingredients, not to mention a Church of England clergyman.

It must be admitted that it is something of a relief to find Mr. Priestley idly amusing himself with a joke about the holy state of matrimony instead of indulging in abstruse speculations on time, space and the third dimension, but the joke grows stale after a while. To add to the guffaws, the actors at the Lyceum are dressed in the period of 1909, resulting in a particularly staggering hair-do on the part of Ann Andrews, who, with Estelle Winwood and A. F. Kaye, does most to keep the Priestley invention at least mildly amusing. Mr. Kaye has the added distinction of getting off his lines in what sounded like an authentic Yorkshire dialect, while the rest either forgot about it entirely or remembered it in the middle of a sentence. Miss Andrews, however, had a merry time getting faintly squiffy, and Miss Winwood turned positively giddy in the last act.

The rest of the company did their best for the cause, but it was impossible not to feel that somehow or other it didn't add up to a three-act Broadway play, even though J. C. Nugent as the blotto photographer inserted what amounted to a burlesque turn right in the middle of the second act. Robert Henderson's direction gave the impression that it had all been whipped up in a stock company fashion in a terrible rush, and that already next week's show was on his mind.

It is always pleasant to see so many agreeable players back on the stage, but the play market must be in a sad state if it is necessary to go to the trouble of sending clear over to England for a trivial item such as "When We Are Married." Even done by a flock of authentic Yorkshire dialects in a city nearer to the Midlands than New York, it couldn't have been anything more than a rather heavy Priestley prank.

# "Billy Draws a Horse"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, December 22, 1939

## "Billy Draws a Horse" Is an English Drawing-Room Farce

"Billy Draws a Horse," comedy by Lesley Storms. Produced by Lee Shubert and William A. Brady at the Playhouse, New York, Dec. 21, 1939.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

I SUSPECT what happened was that some one came over from London with the report that they had seen a frightfully funny light comedy called "Tony Draws a Horse," written by a young woman named Storms—Lesley Storms.

Grace George may have heard about it and mentioned it at dinner. Naturally the gentleman at the other end of the table, he being William A. Brady, would prick up his ears.

The next day Mr. Brady may have mentioned "Tony" to Lee Shubert, only to learn that the crafty Mr. Shubert already had acquired the American rights. So they agreed, if Miss George would do it they would produce the piece together.

Or it may be Mr. Shubert had the rights and suggested the piece to Mr. Brady. Or perhaps a personable young lady named Hayley Bell, who was in the London company, took it upon herself to bring "Tony" to the notice of Mr. Shubert. Or Miss George. Or Mr. Brady.

In any event, here is "Tony Draws a Horse" on the stage of the Playhouse, with Miss George and Miss Bell prominently cast and the

title changed, for no conceivable reason, to "Billy Draws a Horse."

It is not as funny in New York as it may have been in London, where its family types and reactions would naturally have more point.

At the Playhouse it is a mildly amusing account of a family upset caused by a precocious youngster who insists upon drawing

family characters and symbols on the walls of his house as well as on the margins of his schoolbooks.

His father, a doctor, was determined that Billy should be disciplined for the much too realistic horse he had drawn on the wall just outside his consulting room.

His mother thought it was a perfectly normal, if uninhibited, horse, and the fight was on. One thing leading to another, mother walked out of the house and went on a binge with her younger sister's beau. Which provides a tenuous complication upon which two additional acts are hung.

Really, the only valid excuse for "Billy Draws a Horse" is that it gives Miss George a chance, as Billy's grandmother, to exhibit again her comedy gifts and her perfect taste in gowns. She is the darling of this day when it comes to the pointing of comedy lines and the providing of an air of mock gravity with which she can build a perfectly commonplace situation into an incident of seeming importance.

Miss Bell, too, is a nicely schooled and agreeably decorative ingenue to have within reach if a part should be in need of her.

Douglas Walton, a personable juvenile, also makes a first New York appearance in a cast that boasts the services of such dependables as Lumsden Hare, Arthur Margetson, Florence Edney, Harry Plimmer, Jules Epailly and Leo Bulgakov, mostly in sketchy roles.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, December 22, 1939

## English Defeat

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

AMONG the things to be melancholy about in this questionable Yuletide season is the news that Miss Grace George, one of our most talented comedienne, is wasting her time in a feeble English comedy called "Billy Draws a Horse." This is the play known in London as "Tony Draws a Horse," and the mysterious reason for the change made in the title during the work's ocean voyage offers a far more entertaining topic for speculation than anything to be found in Miss George's unhappy vehicle. For here we have one of those insipid little importations which have a way of making us shake our heads sadly over the state of the British drama.

It isn't that we haven't had some small darlings of our own to make us melancholy enough about certain aspects of the local drama. But when the English send us a bad play it isn't merely something dull and infatigable. It is a sort of epic in fatuousness.

"Billy Draws a Horse" is about another of

those English families. There is the customary flighty mother and the usual long-suffering but understanding father. There is the inviolable scene around the breakfast table, where the writers of this type of work seem more comfortable than in the living room or certainly than in the boudoir. There is the usual daughter who is battling with the usual prig-

gish husband, and there is the regulation romance on the sidelines between the blond English juvenile and the pretty English ingenue. It is true that this time the plot manipulations have something to do with the fact that the precocious child of the family has drawn a horse on the wall near his father's office, but essentially "Billy Draws a Horse" is just the same old English family comedy a little bit dullest and more wornout than usual, but virtually intact. Only the sturdiest of optimists could hope that the war will somehow do away with this sort of thing.

This unpleasantness at the Playhouse could be passed off without more than a long-drawn-out yawn were it not for the presence of Miss George in the leading role. But she, it happens, is a performer of such guile and graciousness that anything which causes her to be wasted, when she should be showing the current generation of theatergoers and actresses just how debonair, light-hearted comedy should be played, is to be vigorously deplored. In "Billy Draws a Horse" she is, as usual, both gay and sprightly, but all her acting wiles are wasted on such trash. Prominent in the supporting cast you will find that admirable actor, Lumsden Hare, who should also be given something to do worthy of his exceptional talent. The others perform pleasantly and attractively enough, I suppose, but the odds against them are too great, and another dismal report must be added to the dramatic season's most dismal week.

# "Billy Draws a Horse"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, December 22, 1939

## 'Billy Draws a Horse,' With Grace George, Opens at the Playhouse

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

MISS GRACE GEORGE is one of the most gracious ladies of our stage and even under adverse circumstances her sense of comedy does not perceptibly falter. She can give point to a situation by the tiniest start of surprise. An expertly timed pause makes almost any line seem twice as funny as it really is. But, like all actors, she can get herself into difficulties. Just now she has got herself into "Billy Draws a Horse."

"Billy Draws a Horse," which was composed by Lesley Storm and once played in London, was presented at the Playhouse last evening. It deals with one of those placid ructions which apparently occur regularly in British domestic life and are quite as regularly transported to the stage by British authors. This time the ruction begins when a little boy named Billy draws an anatomically exact picture of a horse on the family wall. This enraged his father and his father enrages his mother. Billy goes back to school and gets out of all this, the lucky little fellow.

Billy's mother goes home to Billy's grandparents, one of whom is fortunately Miss George. A lot of talk about marriage ensues, none of it worth remembering, and the ruction timorously expands. Billy's mother goes innocently to Dieppe with her sister's fiancé. Billy's grandfather stays out late and loses his

### 'BILLY DRAWS A HORSE'

A comedy in three acts, by Lesley Storm; directed by Harry Wagstaff Gribble; settings by Watson Barratt; presented at the Playhouse by Lee Shubert and William A. Brady on December 21, 1939. The cast:

|                    |       |                    |
|--------------------|-------|--------------------|
| Mrs. Smith         | ..... | Florence Edney     |
| Tim Shields        | ..... | Douglas Walton     |
| Clare Fleming      | ..... | Hayley Bell        |
| Dr. Howard Fleming | ..... | Arthur Margetson   |
| Grace              | ..... | Edna Bennett       |
| Grandpapa          | ..... | Harry Plimmer      |
| Elise Parsons      | ..... | Elizabeth Inglis   |
| Mrs. Parsons       | ..... | Grace George       |
| Alfred Parsons     | ..... | Lumsden Hare       |
| Agnes              | ..... | Carol Curtis Brown |
| Peschenschynoff    | ..... | Leo Bulgakov       |
| Walter             | ..... | Julius Epally      |
| A Customer         | ..... | William Chambers   |
| Miss Burchill      | ..... | Marion Sittler     |

trousers. Billy's grandmother wears a feather boa at breakfast and Billy's great-grandfather snaffles a piece of forbidden sausage in the tepid confusion.

Everybody tries hard to make this amusing and Miss George has a few moments of partial success. You can't keep a good comedienne down entirely, but if you are the author of "Billy Draws a Horse" you can make a mighty good stab at it. Weary familiarity of plot and a flood of lukewarm epigrams will give any actor a bit more than he can cope with. I am afraid the author of "Billy Draws a Horse" is one who can baffle even Miss George.

The author succeeds also in baffling Arthur Margetson, Douglas Walton, Elizabeth Inglis and Lumsden Hare. Miss Hayley Bell puts up a nice fight against the tedium and Leo Bulgakov and Julius Epally almost escape it entirely in their brief appearances. But tedium triumphs in the end.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, December 22, 1939

## Grace George Brightens Billy Draws a Horse

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

IN DEFENSE of the hands-across-the-sea and blood-is-thicker-than-water policy that has motivated most of our relations with the British since 1812, it is often declared that "we think alike" and that "we speak the same language." Neither statement is correct. There is no more similarity between the mellow English comedy and the tangy American brand than there is between the mushmouth Oxford articulation and the clearcut, if nasal, Yankee speech.

The difference was brought home to us last night at the opening of Lesley Storm's London success, Billy Draws a Horse, which is brightened by the presence of Miss Grace George but dimmed by a number of other factors, chief among them, in the words of J. B. Priestley, that "we have been here before."

Of perhaps 10 plays imported from London in late years, omitting those dealing with the subject of sexual aberrations, nine have to do with the comic complications of upper-middle class life, and eight of these begin and end with the curious institution of the British breakfast table, sausages, and the Mater's dominance over the matutinal coffee cups.

Billy Draws a Horse is one of these. It contains all of those characters whom the British playwrights must love so much because they

make so many of them. The voluble and familiar old housekeeper who explains the family history in the first scene. The inept, sassy parlor maid without makeup. The easy-going, henpecked paterfamilias. . . . The advanced young matron. Her smug, dignified and boring husband. And the superficial but determined matriarch of the type which Hollywood, without a second's thought, automatically assigns to Billy Burke.

It is the continual reappearance of this family, down to its last domestic, in nearly every play that arrives on these shores under stout British convoy, that makes me understand why the English are called a bulldog breed.

Britons never, never will be slaves to anything but true and tried ideas. They like their port, their cheese and their plays old and mellow, and the three items of contentment are similar in their effect upon physical and mental digestion.

The novelty of Miss Storm's play is that it revolves around a highly original and, in its essence, a quite humorous idea. A 10-year-old boy has drawn on the wall of his father's reception room a too realistic picture of a horse, and his father, a physician but no psychologist, is shocked at the display of anatomical accuracy. The incident leads to a family dispute in which the boy's mother deserts her husband, the home of the boy's grandfather is split asunder, several lives are nearly blasted, and the grandfather, spending the night in jail, loses his chance of becoming Lord Mayor. The families are reunited when Billy draws another picture (showing the matriarch at the breakfast table) which wins a newspaper prize.

Well, this is the stuff of which the modern British comedy (see George and Margaret) is made, and the Londoners go to the play with the same eagerness that we try to get tickets to Life With Father. I do not believe, despite Miss George's magnificent contribution of a shining characterization, that it has a chance to succeed in opposition to our own roaring designs for laughter.

There are several other unusually pleasing performances, among them those of Lumsden Hare as the hen-pecked but rebellious grandfather, Harry Plimmer as a mildly profane and wholesome great-grandfather, and Leo Bulgakov as an eccentric soap-box orator. Of the new English importations, I admired most Miss Elizabeth Inglis, not only because of the excellence of her performance as an ingenue, but because she is singularly and happily free from the affliction of thick ankles which so many London actresses acquire, no doubt through years of climbing up and down from the top of buses.

But it is Miss George whom I most reverently salute today, for providing a quickening in interest whenever she was on the stage, which was never long enough.



# "Billy Draws a Horse"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, December 22, 1939

## Grace George in a London Number Entitled 'Billy Draws a Horse'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

SINCE London has more urgent matters in hand it would be uncivil to taunt West Enders now about a little number that opened there last Winter. Over there it was known as "Tony Draws a Horse," and Lillian Braithwaite fluttered at the leading role. With an eye to the advantages of alphabetical listing, Mr. Brady calls it "Billy Draws a Horse" on our realistic Broadway. It opened at the Playhouse last evening with Grace George imparting buoyancy to the chief character. Any device for getting Miss George on to a stage again has a good deal to commend it before the first line is spoken. But the public service performed by Lesley Storm's comedy stops there. It is stale in idea, frail in composition—to tell the truth it is not very good. "Fiddle-dee-dee," Scarlett O'Hara would say. "Fiddle-faddle," less mannerly people might exclaim.

Billy does not appear in it in person, which is probably just as well. He comes into the title because a slightly anatomical horse he has scrawled on a wall at home provokes his father and mother into a quarrel that nearly splits the family. By coy degrees this initial vagary results in very nearly spitting up the home of Billy's grandparents. Grandpa gets himself arrested for conduct unbecoming an English gentleman at a public meeting in a park, and two others find themselves in a compromising situation at a cafe in Dieppe. Although it is not usual to expect logic from a frivolous comedy, it is fair to say that Miss Storm has taken considerable advantage of any audience's good nature. She writes at random. "Billy Draws a Horse" looks like a lamentable shuffling of the papers on her desk.

Miss George bravely attacks it with her

comic feather duster. A dainty version of the Helen Hokinson female juggernaut, she trips lightly through Miss Storm's rambling scenes, fluttering her handkerchief, fluttering her eyelids, fluttering also the hopes of a loyal audience. She is a witty-minded person and she can create an impression of wit by darting out a hand in a desperate gesture or by giving a quick lift to her shoulders. But only a bolt of lightning could upset the somnolence of Miss Storm's idle writing. Leo Bulgakov in introduces a bit of character acting in one almost imperceptible part. But Arthur Margeson, Hayley Bell and Lumsden Hare can do nothing with the silly parts that have fallen their way, and Harry Wagstaff Gribble has made nothing out of nothing in the direction.

If "Billy Draws a Horse" had been written by an American no one would dream of producing it here. There is something about the Atlantic Ocean that makes fiddle-faddle look like a genuine caprice if it is safely on the other side.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, December 22, 1939

## Grace George Acts in "Billy Draws a Horse"

Mr. Shubert and Mr. Brady Present an English Comedy  
by Lesley Storm

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IF ONLY someone had snatched the crayon away from that unseen but much-talked-about varmint, little Billy! If only he had not drawn a too realistic picture of a horse on a wall in his London home! Why then his parents would not have quarreled to the breaking point; his mother would not have fled to granny's; or taken an overnight trip to Dieppe with his sister's fiancé. In fact, if only little Billy had never heard of art, some of us would have been spared Lesley Storm's unfortunate English comedy last night. And that would have been a gain.

A sillier, more inconsequential script than Miss Storm's would be hard to imagine. Yet we have little Billy to thank for three performances at the Playhouse. One of these is the unchanging but ever-amusing characterization Jules Bpally is now giving briefly as a French waiter. Another is the humorously sketched and ingratiating bit Leo Bulgakov contributes as the agitator Billy's grandfather befriends.

Most of all, however (and this would be more than enough to make us forgive anyone except little Billy), is the fact that he brings Grace George back again behind the footlights.

Miss George is a lovely actress; slim, trim, radiant, and possessed of a beguiling gift for comedy. Seeing her is always a joy. But having her bothered with little Billy is just another reason why we hate the brat and refuse to be friendly to him or his works. It is not that we love Miss George less; it is merely that we hate little Billy more. That is saying a great deal.

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# "Du Barry Was a Lady"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, December 7, 1939

## 'Du Barry Was a Lady,' With Ethel Merman, Opens at the Forty-sixth Street

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

**B.** G. DE SYLVA was in a bountiful mood last evening. He gave us both Bert Lahr and Ethel Merman, wrapped in a single handsome package called "Du Barry was a Lady." He turned Raoul Pene DuBois loose with bright silks and satins and let him dress the stage of the Forty-sixth Street Theater and the ladies of the ensemble as his fancy dictated. He gave Cole Porter as free a hand with music and lyrics, and took a pretty free hand himself with plot and jokes. He and Herbert Fields took a very free hand indeed with some of the jokes.

And all this added up beautifully. Mr. Lahr made his funniest faces and Miss Merman rollicked in Mr. Porter's songs, and played on display that wide-eyed, confidential leer of hers which somehow manages to impart a kind of innocence to the most outrageous. The two of them together sang madly of their undying friendship and Mr. Lahr promised faithfully that if they cut Miss Merman in half he wouldn't laugh. Mr. Lahr pursued Miss Merman throughout the evening and never caught her, and remained comical even under these trying circumstances.

Mr. Fields and Mr. De Sylva have thrown plot around lavishly, and not cared much where it fell. Some of it falls in a men's washroom, where Mr. Lahr is the attendant until

he wins a sweepstakes prize. Then he drinks a "mickey jinn" intended for another suitor of the shining Merman, and after that he dreams that he is Louis XV of France and she Du Barry. Even as Du Barry she is illusive, and just when he seems to be making progress the Dauphin shoots him with an arrow, the arrow going precisely where you suppose. Doesn't sound too funny, does it?

But it is with Mr. Lahr and Miss Merman. It is rough and rather hoarse in spots, but the very frankness of its bawdry and the blithe refusal of the stars even to admit that there is anything to be ashamed about should dis-

### "DU BARRY WAS A LADY"

A musical comedy in two acts; music and lyrics by Cole Porter; book by Herbert Fields and B. G. De Sylva and staged by Edgar MacGregor; dances by Robert Alton; costumes and scenery by Raoul Pene DuBois. Presented at the Forty-sixth Street Theater on December 6, 1939, by Mr. De Sylva. The cast:

|              |       |                 |
|--------------|-------|-----------------|
| Jones        | ..... | Hugh Cameron    |
| Bill Kelly   | ..... | Walter Armin    |
| Harry Norton | ..... | Charles Walters |
| Alice Barton | ..... | Betty Grable    |
| Florian      | ..... | Harold Cresser  |
| Louis Blore  | ..... | Bert Lahr       |
| Vi Hennessey | ..... | Jean Mooshead   |
| May Daly     | ..... | Ethel Merman    |
| Alex Barton  | ..... | Ronald Graham   |
| Ann Barton   | ..... | Kay Sutton      |
| Manuel Gomez | ..... | Tito Renaldo    |
| Charley      | ..... | Benny Baker     |

arm the sternest moralist. And there are always Mr. Porter's songs to listen to—"Do I Love You," as Ronald Graham sings it; "But in the Morning, No!" as it emerges from Miss Merman and Mr. Lahr; the song of the title, with Miss Merman leading; "Katie Went to Haiti," which is all Miss Merman's, and a handful of others. Mr. Porter may have written even more gayly once or twice, but these will do nicely. And, for another quick glance in a gift horse's face, the first act could stand cutting.

It is a funny, jolly, tuneful show, beautifully dressed and ornamented with stars and starlets. Among the latter count Betty Grable, of the nimble, lovely legs; Mr. Graham, Henry Baker, Charles Walters and all the fetching young women of the chorus, some of whom are so remarkably displayed by Mr. DuBois's costumes.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, December 7, 1939

## New Hit

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

**I**T IS a strange thing to say of so bright and dashing a show as "Du Barry Was a Lady" that there is something nostalgic about it, but the quality is present and it is one of the virtues of the new musical comedy. In its glitter and expansiveness and toughness, in its hard-boiled gaiety and its unashamed low-comedy laughter, it is the type of Broadway girl-and-music entertainment that used to prosper in the vicinity of Forty-second Street in the palmy days of prohibition and now is seen so rarely. I must repeat that I am not saying this in criticism. There was something comforting about these lavish frolics that weren't afraid to let the rowdy comics be at their rowdiest, and so I welcome "Du Barry Was a Lady" with considerable enthusiasm. With the wonderful Miss Merman and the great Mr. Lahr having themselves a hilarious field day, the new show is a brash Broadway musical comedy at just about its best.

It is, of course, Miss Merman and Mr. Lahr who make "Du Barry Was a Lady" the good fun that it is. Since Cole Porter's songs for Miss Merman are not quite as effective as usual, this most dashing of our lady comics must rely chiefly on that air of hearty good fellowship that is so winning a part of her, and she plays the nightclub singer, who becomes a rough-and-ready Du Barry after the plot has got started, with that engaging relish that makes her so irresistible an entertainer. Mr. Lahr, who doesn't need a song, is even more effective. As funny as ever—or, to be properly outspoken about it, even funnier—the returned film exile plays a washroom attendant, who becomes King Louis XV in the plot, with the sort of spluttering, indignant violence and leering impudence that makes him one of the best comedians in the world. I found him particularly happy as the king who has a lot of trouble getting anywhere with Du Barry and in a spare moment thinks up a new relief project. He is going to build a bridge across the Seine lengthwise.

If your sense of fun is fairly delicate you might imagine in advance that you would not be particularly amused at the sight of Mr. Lahr attempting to teach his trade to a new washroom attendant, or being shot from the

rear by one of the Dauphin's arrows. Yet somehow I suspect that any one will find the two resulting scenes two of the funniest things in town. It is because the plot—with its tale of how the gentleman from the washroom loved the club torch singer and then dreamed that he was Louis and she Du Barry—gives an opportunity for such episodes that it is a satisfactory one, even if it is quite a while getting started. As for Mr. Porter's score, I must say again that I do not think it is one of his best, but it contains one of the nicest songs of the year in "Do I Love You?" and is generally serviceable. Thanks to the remarkably imaginative and colorful settings and costumes, "Du Barry Was a Lady" possesses, as another virtue, unusual pictorial loveliness.

Naturally, the show is all Miss Merman and Mr. Lahr, which is a fine thing for any show to be. There is helpful work, too, by a comical fellow named Benny Baker as the apprentice washroom attendant and the dim-witted Dauphin, Miss Betty Grable, the "movie" girl, is pictorially helpful, which is no doubt all that it is necessary for her to be in this particular case. Ronald Graham sings the lovely "Do I Love You?" excellently and helps out with the fairly limited romantic interest. A little Negro dancer named Harold Cresser appears agilely several times, and the girls of the chorus are good-looking. "Du Barry was a Lady" is neither a delicate nor a particularly imaginative show, but the important thing is that it is honestly and hilariously funny, and I hail it as the newest and one of the most resounding hits in town.

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# "Du Barry Was a Lady"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, December 7, 1939

## "Du Barry Was a Lady" With Miss Merman and Mr. Lahr

B. G. De Sylva Presents Cole Porter's Agreeable New Musical Comedy

By JOHN MASON BROWN

INASMUCH as Ethel Merman and Bert Lahr are shows in themselves, and superior ones at that, "Du Barry Was a Lady" starts off with more in its favor than most musical comedies can claim when they are through. That it happens to have had its music and lyrics supplied by Cole Porter is certainly no handicap either, even if in this case, while he continues to produce melodies worthy of his own high standards, Mr. Porter's lyrics lack that final fleetness of invention one has come to expect from him.

Raoul Pene DuBois is a designer who, in the majority of cases, can also be counted upon to perform his eye-billing duty well. And Herbert Fields and B. G. De Sylva are librettists who know how to turn out a serviceable book.

That is a satisfactory but more routine way than anticipated—is precisely what they have proceeded to do in their saga about a gentleman's washroom attendant who, due to the chaperonage of a Mickey Finn and a movie he has seen dealing with court life in old France, dreams that he is Louis XV and Miss Merman his Du Barry.

Such a dream would be no nightmare under any circumstances. And Mr. Fields and Mr. De Sylva have seen to it, with Mr. Lahr's and Miss Merman's valiant aid, that it is very far from this at the Forty-sixth Street. What

they have provided is a rowdy, bolterous, high-spirited extravaganza which stops at just this side of nothing and makes much of little.

In Praise of Miss Merman and Mr. Lahr

That "Du Barry Was a Lady" has sex on its mind cannot be denied. That it revels in well-titled jokes is no less obvious. But that most of its well-dressed Minskyisms are amusing is no less incontestable. It is Miss Merman and Mr. Lahr who must be thanked for this; they and Ronald Graham, who has a charming voice, an ingratiating personality, and can do full justice to Mr. Porter's more love-sick notations.

Miss Merman sweeps through the evening

with that bright-eyed, shining vitality which is always such a captivating feature of her playing and her singing, she needs no vitamins; she has plenty to spare. Her throat houses as beguiling a callosity as Broadway knows. The Midas touch is upon her tonsils because she can turn brass into gold. She can do more than that. She can keep it brass. No one can match her in putting a song across, in trumpeting its lyrics, in personifying its rhythms. All the bright lights of Broadway seem to shine from behind her face. Hard-boiled she frankly is but she makes toughness itself an irresistible virtue. She possesses not only great energy but a kind of shimmering dignity, too; a dignity born of her poise, her skill, her honesty, and her magnificent professionalism.

"Give Him the Oo-La-La" and "Katie Went to Haiti" may not be Mr. Porter's masterpieces, but Miss Merman sings them with just as much verve and authority as if they were. While she is saxophonizing them on her vocal cords they are satisfying enough. It is when she breaks down at the end of a good evening to join Mr. Lahr in such an enchanting spoof "Frisco Ship," that Miss Merman's vital comic talents are seen at their best. Then she goes to town in as big a way as she did with Mr. Durante at the conclusion of "Stars in Your Eyes."

Mr. Lahr proves no less helpful. He is a hugely funny fellow; a comic who grows more and more comic with the years. Like Miss Merman he has boundless zest. His crossed eyes, the bullfrog croakings which emerge from his pond-like mouth, his hilarious travesties of the operatic manner or the ritual of court etiquette—all these prove reliable ammunition in his comic shotgun.

Give Mr. Lahr a scene in a lavabos or let an arrow hit him so that he is forced to stand up, and he can do plenty. He may not be a Puritan, but he belongs to the aristocracy of perfect fools.

Some grateful mention must also be made of Benny Baker's droll, though unassuming portrait of the young Louis XVI, of Charles Walters' agile dancing, and of Betty Grable's grace and charm. But the evening belongs to Mr. Lahr and Miss Merman. They make more than the most of a routine show. Indeed, they make it very pleasant.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, December 7, 1939

## Du Barry Was a Lady, New Musical Comedy

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

COLE PORTER, Herbert Fields and B. G. De Sylva leer at history with magnificent impudence in their new musical comedy, called Du Barry Was a Lady, and with the aid of Bert Lahr, Ethel Merman and a large group of irreverent historians turn the august court of Versailles into a modern night-club riot.

The settings in which the new Du Barry came to town would have made the royal architects of the Trianon Palace weep with envy. The costuming would have bankrupted the royal treasury. The modern ideas of King Louis' mattress on titre would have provoked the French Revolution one generation earlier. In fact, the original Versailles seems like an insipid pastoral compared to this 1939 spectacle.

In order to provide an excuse for turning back the pages of history, as well as for the liberal distortion of any facts which might have been in the way, the authors make use of a conventional, midwinter night's dream that translates Bert Lahr, custodian of the towels in a men's wash room, into the resplendent King of France, and Ethel Merman, a torch singer, into His Majesty's lover. As old as this device may be, you can forgive it this once, because of the happy results.

Mr. Lahr, struggling with hoarse-voiced coyness in the intricacies of French pronunciation; Miss Merman, proclaiming with shy

modesty that she is "mistress in name only" and perspiring in her innocence to the end; Benny Baker, a roly-poly Dauphin with an ingenious delight at shooting arrows into his regal sire's derriere, these are the framework of the comedy action which Mr. Porter has surrounded with joyful songs and which Robert Alton has embellished with dances that swing from the exquisite 18th century to the staccato 20th.

Mr. Porter's score, it seems to me, is one of his happiest in several years, and many of his new songs, particularly Do I Love You, will rank at the top in popularity this winter. Others which will be whistled if not sung (because the lyrics are very, very tricky, with

"suburban" rhyming with "Deanna Durbin") are Every Day a Holiday, When Love Beckoned, It Was Written in the Stars, and a novelty song called Friendship, memorable if only for the way Mr. Lahr and Miss Merman put it over.

Miss Merman becomes, indeed, a greater comedienne with every new show — and a worse singer. But that's all right with me, at least, because I prefer the comedy anyway. As for Mr. Lahr, whose bolterous nonsense has something of the explosive quality of Jimmy Durante's, I find him a great antidote for the accumulated gloom that results from constant drama-going.

Raoul Pene DuBois, who smashed the town in the eyes with his black and white settings for One For the Money, has reached new heights in his designs for Du Barry Was a Lady. His general scheme is blue and white, with an occasional striking contrast in deep yellow.

Surrounding the principals, Mr. De Sylva has brought Miss Betty Grable from the Coast; Charles Walters from wherever he has been hiding; Hugh Cameron, Kay Sutton and Walter Armin and a host of young dancers and singers to fill the gorgeous picture. The chickadees of the chorus appear to be the cream of the 1939 crop of beauties. Incidentally, Miss Grable was not what I expected and feared. She was actually good, despite Hollywood training.

Ronald Graham, who was acclaimed last year for his work in The Boys from Syracuse, repeats his success and adds to his reputation in the new production, in which he carries the burden of playing the romantic juvenile lead. Musical comedy needs more of his type—if they could be found.

Last night's audience, at \$7.70 a plush seat, found this Park Avenue burlesque show, as Mr. Kealey Allen described it, very much to its liking. With their judgment I heartily concur.



# "Du Barry Was a Lady"

Reprinted from the NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, December 7, 1939

## "Du Barry Was a Lady," or the Wash Room Boy's Day Dream

"Du Barry Was a Lady," musical comedy by Herbert Fields and B. G. De Sylva, with music and lyrics by Cole Porter. Produced by Mr. De Sylva at the 46th St. Theatre, New York, Dec. 6, 1939.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

I HAD been warned that "Du Barry Was a Lady" was frankly on the coarse side, but when I heard a house jammed with sober-sided Quakers in Philadelphia laugh their heads loose at it last Saturday I decided that it was nothing to be squeamish about.

Last night, picking it up again at the 46th St. Theatre, where a packed house of New Yorkers (at a \$7.70 top for seats) were also indicating a willingness to roll in the aisles if urged, I decided that, coarse or not, it was a kind of entertainment the populace was eager to pay to see, so that's that.

There are, as you probably know, two kinds of burlesque. One is coarse and dumb. The other is coarse and smart. "Du Barry Was a Lady" is also definitely on the smart side.

It has a B. G. De Sylva-Herbert Fields story that starts in the gents' wash room of a night club. I defy you to go farther and find a more substantial foundation for the kind of physical humor in which burlesquers delight.

### Smart Fellows

But, see how smart these lad are: They start in the gents' wash room, and then, by giving the attendant a \$75,000 sweepstakes prize and a few knockout drops they transport him to the court of Louis XV in a dream.

And there, being even smarter, they spend a small fortune on probably the most beautiful

set of costumes that any musical show has displayed on Broadway in ages. Raoul Pene DuBois designed them and they are sufficiently rich and handsome, I would say, to startle even a designers' convention.

From the third scene to the seventh, therefore, the stage is asplashed with beauty and the coarser jokes are swallowed up in it.

It isn't easy to change a burlesquer's spots, but when they are covered with rich hangings he is easier to look at. And so are his lady friends.

Bert Lahr and Ethel Merman are the stars of "Du Barry Was a Lady." Miss Merman is the queen of the floor show in the night club where Mr. Lahr attends the male customers.

When he has won his sweepstakes prize and

tries to make arrangements to share his wealth with Miss Ethel, she spurns him in favor of the usual handsome baritone. It is when he tries to be rid of the baritone that Mr. Lahr drinks the whiskey he has drugged for his rival. Thereafter he dreams that he is the King Louis XV he has seen in the movies, and Miss Merman is his Du Barry.

### Good Cast

They are a well matched pair, she a fine foil for his fun, he a grand contrast for her sophistication. Whether they are chasing each other through a boudoir or the Triana gardens, they are hilariously in key with the book.

Aiding and shaping the entertainment are some of Cole Porter's most melodious tunes, and several of his brighter lyrics. He is a kind of one-man entertainment in himself, and does better out of the wash room than in it, because of an inherent superiority he can't quite discard.

The supporting cast is strengthened by the presence of Betty Grable, a graceful and spirited dancer, and Benny Baker, a fat boy with a natural bent for comedy. Ronald Graham sings the favored songs admirably and plays the hero modestly. Charles Walters fills in capably and Hugh Cameron walks on and off with proper assurance.

There are excellent dancing specialties by Audrey Palmer, Johnny Barnes and a gifted trio I haven't time to locate in a lengthy program. Robert Alton has again done wonders with the dance ensembles and Edgar McGregor has staged the book intelligently.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, December 7, 1939

## Bert Lahr and Ethel Merman in 'Du Barry Was a Lady' With Cole Porter's Music

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ACCORDING to the title "Du Barry Was a Lady." As a matter of fact she is Ethel Merman, which is more to the point, and Louis is Bert Lahr, which puts us all one up on history. For the musical show in which they are appearing is burlesque in gorgeous finery, with a lively score by Cole Porter and all the accoutrements of a first-rate Broadway carnival. Herbert Fields and B. G. De Sylva have collaborated on one of the roughest books that ever headed up-town from Minsky. Robert Alton has staged some of the gaudiest chorus dancing of the season, and Raoul Pene Du Bois has dressed the actors handsomely. To this theatregoer "Du Barry Was a Lady" comes a little short of expectations, having only one idea in its comedy and that a disenchanted one. Fortunately, Miss Merman and Mr. Lahr are the people to make vulgarity honestly exuberant.

Miss Merman is the perfect musical comedy minstrel. She is practically master of the band, beating the rhythm as she sings it and strutting the tune. Before the show goes as far back as Du Barry she is a nightclub singer of torrid temperatures. As Du Barry she wears the capacious costumes of the time, but the Merman gleam triumphs over them. Give her a rogues' bit of bawdiness like "Give Him the

Oo-La-La," with a good tune and shoddy lyrics, and she can set a hoop-skirt swaying like a one-woman chorus. Give her a modern ballad like "Katie Went to Haiti" and she can set it on fire. Mr. Porter's ideas are a little skimpy this time, and never more microscopic than in "But in the Morning, No." But Miss Merman attacks them all with the joy and magnetism of the perfect music hall singer.

Probably it is a mistake ever to produce a musical show without Bert Lahr. Certainly it would be a mistake to let any one else impersonate a wash-room attendant who dreams

he is the King of France. As a muzz Bert is funny enough, stretching his odd map into fantastic shapes and registering surprise like an idiot mountebank. But when Bert acquires the elegances of high society and mangles high-born phrases, some wild sounds emanate from that cavernous mouth and the Lahr nose indicates disdain uproariously. He is in great form in this brassy masquerade, full of gargantuan antics.

Although Miss Merman is jaunty and Mr. Lahr is funny, they have a hard time keeping this show merry. The authors have struck a dead level of Broadway obscenity that does not yield much mirth. As the music-maker Mr. Porter has written a number of accomplished tunes in the modern idiom and one excellent romantic song, "Do I Love You?" but the lyrics are no more inspired than the book; they treat all humor as middling. The performers supply more pleasure than the authors and composer. Betty Grable and Charles Walters, who would also be featured in a free society, dance and sing with remarkable dash. Ronald Graham is an excellent singer of romantic music, and Benny Baker is by way of being a funny man when his material is richer. Johnny Barnes contributes a volatile dance to one of Mr. Porter's most beautiful themes, and Audrey Palmer dances a beguiling ballet. All the chorus dancing is extraordinarily inventive and exhilarating.

Even those who are not squeamish will find the obscenity of "Du Barry Was a Lady" a little deadening through a long and uninflected evening. They will have to take the pleasure where they can find most of it in a band of uncommonly attractive performers led by the incomparable Merman and Lahr.

# "Hamlet"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, December 5, 1939

## Maurice Evans and the 'Entirety' "Hamlet" Come Back to 44th St.

"Hamlet," the entirety version of William Shakespeare's story. Revived by Maurice Evans at the 44th St. Theatre, New York, Dec. 4, 1939.

★ ★ ★  
By BURNS MANTLE

MAURICE EVANS is pausing in his tour of the country to give New Yorkers another glimpse of the "entirety 'Hamlet,'" which means about all the "Hamlet" that any actor anywhere in the world has to show.

He is making the stop at the Forty-fourth street theatre, where there are many seats, which gives him a chance to invite the multitude at the multitude's price. His audience last night was large and enthused.

The young actor-manager, who in three years has practically established himself as the first Shakespearean star of the American theatre, returns with his vim, vigor and vitality undiminished.

His moderately melancholy Dane retains the fire with which he first invested the role. He is, as he wants to be, the most normal and the most youthfully spirited of the Hamlets of his time. And, vocally, the most eloquent.

Happily for them, there are no competitors approaching. In a year or two, perhaps, Laurence Olivier may get away from Hollywood long enough to play the Dane for us, as he has said he might, but there is little likelihood that John Gielgud will make another American tour and there is no native Hamlet in the offing. Certainly none that might threaten the Evans' supremacy.

### Good Show

The virtues of the "entirety" version remain as they were on the occasion of last

season's revival. The development of the story is consistently filled in and the added text is interesting to student and casual player alike.

Mr. Evans, both in his own performance and that of his supporting players, insists upon good drama. Margaret Webster, in her direction, has worked in entire sympathy with that thought.

Thus the highlighting of the soliloquies is accomplished without strain and the pointing up of the lighter scenes, particularly both the first and second player scenes, is helpful in giving the production a variety of tone and mood.

I think the Evans playing of the second player scene, in which Hamlet interrupts a rehearsal of the players to give them his in-

structions in reading, is the most fluently effective of any that I have seen, and that takes in several.

Hamlet's scenes with Ophelia and with his mother continue to be the most moving of the performance. I think I should keep the star a little less in the pink spotlight in the scene with the Ghost for all his good looks, but that is a matter of personal reaction.

### New Polonius

The chief, if not the only, changes in cast are those of the Polonius and the First Gravedigger. George Graham, the original Polonius, died a few weeks ago in Chicago. He has been succeeded by Raymond Johnson, a short, round, friendly fellow with a fine sense of the chamberlain's comic side. He was splendidly successful last night.

There was some talk among the scholars as to whether or not Polonius was justified in wearing spectacles, which is a departure, but I assume the Evans research department can prove that there were eyeglasses of one kind or another in Hamlet's day, though probably not with circular silver bows.

Rhys Williams doubles the roles of the Player King and the First Grave Digger, wearing the Hecate speech forcefully, and well and making the gravedigger a good-natured Welshman. At least I think he was Welsh.

Mady Christians repeats her fine performance of the youngish queen. Katherine Locke is obliging this week with a repetition of her appealing Ophelia. Henry Edwards is again the King, Sydney Smith the Laertes and Donald Randolph the Horatio.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, December 5, 1939

## Maurice Evans Returns With His "Hamlet"

His Fine Production Reaches the Stage of the Forty-fourth Street Theatre

By JOHN MASON BROWN

NOT in our time is a play by William Shakespeare apt to be so ably acted and so brilliantly directed as is Maurice Evans' revival of the uncut "Hamlet." His production remains a masterpiece of Shakespearean staging.

Seen now at the Forty-fourth Street, where it is playing a return engagement limited to five weeks, it once again finds the theatre at its most exciting best. This time it is being performed without an hour out for dinner. This time it begins not at five-thirty but at seven-thirty, and lasts, with two twelve-minute intermissions, until eleven-thirty. But once again the hours race by in its presence.

They are sent scurrying on their way by the sheer, unimpeded greatness of the tragedy which can once again be followed in all the wondrous richness of Shakespeare's writing of it. They are annihilated, too, by the vitality, the sweep, the depth, and the all-quickenings and revealing values both of the playing and of the direction.

### A Brilliant Performance

Mr. Evans' Hamlet is even surer than it was. It has lost none of its freshness. It is as vigorous, as unconventional, and as glorious to listen to as when first he acted it. Like almost everything else in his revival it has the virtue of increasing one's awareness of the glories of the play—as a whole.

Mr. Evans speaks with the authority of the

unabridged text. And he speaks with a clarity, a beauty, and a drive unmatched on the modern stage. His voice is an instrument of amazing sonority. It proves worthy of the mighty melodies Shakespeare has given him to play upon it. Fortunately he does not sing. His sound is the echo of his thinking. His male prince, his extrovert prince, his prince who has the discretion to wait until he reaches his soliloquies before beginning to soliloquize, his prince who could have been king and who dies thinking of the state, is no mere reciter. If he escapes happily from the convention of pale brooders, it is because his masculine Hamlet is born of a deliberate design and fits into an admirable pattern.

The wonder is that Mr. Evans' Dane is really the superb creation it is. Mr. Evans cannot claim Mr. Barrymore's face and figure. He does not erupt into those uncertain moments of sheer brilliance Mr. Gielgud achieved. He is really a character actor with Hamlet's part the challenge of playing a straight part. But so unmatched is his technique, so refreshing is his interpretation, so excitingly concerned is he with the excitement of the entire play, and so stunning is his voice that, while other modern actors may have excelled him in this scene or in that, no one in our time has done greater justice in the theatre to the whole Hamlet than has he.

### A Magnificent Revival

Not only the whole Hamlet, but the whole of "Hamlet," too. Once again the so-called secondary characters spring into new life and a new significance due not only to the uncut text but also to Margaret Webster's unfailingly contributive and imaginative direction.

Mady Christians' Gertrude and Henry Edwards' Claudius continue to be characterizations of uncommon excellence. Both of them add welcome values by the insight and originality of their playing. Katherine Locke's Ophelia is still admirable in its mad scenes, even if last night Miss Locke seemed to have lost her way and grown stiff and unresponsive in the earlier episodes. John Barclay's Ghost is the best read, most impressive elder Hamlet to have stalked the ramparts hereabouts within recent memory.

Although Raymond Johnson's Polonius lacks certain of the courtly qualities the late George Graham so ably suggested, he can claim his reliable comic virtues. The truth is that from the grave-diggers of Rhys Williams and Henry Jones to the priest of Walter Williams and the Marcellus of Donald Cameron, the production at the Forty-fourth Street is the most fully rounded and stirring Shakespearean revival to have been made in the American theatre in our time.

Once again it must be pointed out that no one can claim to have seen "Hamlet" who has not responded to the excitement and the beauties of Mr. Evans' production. It is one of the major theatrical achievements of our day.

# "Hamlet"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, December 5, 1939

## Maurice Evans's 'Hamlet,' Uncut, Is Revived at Forty-fourth Street

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

MAURICE EVANS brought his uncut "Hamlet" back last evening, housing it in the Forty-fourth Street Theater, and critical superlatives may suitably be resurrected from last season's files. All those qualities which made this full-length version so magnificently one of the events of last year are still evident. And to the excellencies of his performance Mr. Evans has made additions.

Or, at any rate, this admirer of Mr. Evans can admire more wholeheartedly. Where last season his playing seemed brilliant, but a little patchy, it is now more nearly the serenely impressive whole of one's fondest hopes. It is not so much that his Hamlet has gained in stature as that it

has gained in completeness and continuity. The most impressive scenes, such as that with the Queen in her closet, have lost none of the brilliance of color and shading. And some scenes which Mr. Evans seemed last season to slight a little are now played solidly, with new depth and intensity. The cutting edge of Hamlet's humor is keener in his toying with Polonius; his wit is more confident in the scene with Oric and it seems to me that the love scene with Ophelia has been intensified, possibly in part because of Miss Katherine Locke's greater sureness and resource in the role.

Mr. Evans's is superlatively good playing, lighted by intelligence, individual in interpretation and, through all its great length, utterly consistent and impressive. It has fire without extravagance. He speaks the lines beautifully, as he has always done, and now he never—or almost never—seems hurried, as he once or twice seemed to me last season.

His supporting cast is little changed. Miss Locke's playing is, I think, improved. Miss Mady Christians has lost none of the emotional force which made her Gertrude outstanding among the Shakespearean queens of recent years. Donald Randolph's manly, restrained Horatio is still an admirably interpreted part. And Raymond Johnson, coming new to the part of Polonius, has his own richly comical interpretation of the part which is played more variously, I suppose, than any other in the tragedy. This Polonius is funny in his prosiness, but never contemptible and never merely novel.

The lesser parts are generally well played. The mob scenes show some tendency to get out of hand, and the staging which permits asides from the lords, ladies and attendants to become audible is sometimes a little unfortunate. This is about as minor a flaw as one could find in "Hamlet," probably. The

### "HAMLET"

Shakespeare's tragedy, uncut, arranged in three acts and twenty scenes; staged by Margaret Webster; costumes and scenery by David Folkess; incidental music by Lehman Engel; revived at the Forty-fourth Street Theater by Maurice Evans. The cast:

|                            |                                  |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Francisco                  | Lauren Gilbert                   |
| Bernardo                   | John McQuade                     |
| Marcellus                  | Donald Cameron                   |
| Horatio                    | Donald Randolph                  |
| Claudius, King of Denmark  | Henry Edwards                    |
| Gertrude, Queen of Denmark | Mady Christians                  |
| Hamlet                     | Maurice Evans                    |
| Polonius                   | Raymond Johnson                  |
| Laertes                    | Sydney Smith                     |
| Voltemand                  | Walter Williams                  |
| Cornelius                  | Frederic Carney                  |
| A page                     | Kurt Richards                    |
| Ophelia                    | Katherine Locke                  |
| Ghost of Hamlet's father   | John Barclay                     |
| Reynaldo                   | Henry Jones                      |
| Rosencrans                 | Lauren Gilbert                   |
| Guidenstern                | Emmett Rogers                    |
| Player King                | Rhys Williams                    |
| Player Queen               | Kurt Richards                    |
| Third player               | John McQuade                     |
| Fourth player              | Howard Wierum                    |
| A lady in waiting          | Jackson Perkins                  |
| Fortinbras                 | John Barclay                     |
| A captain                  | Alfred Paschall                  |
| A gentleman                | George Keane                     |
| Two sailors                | Alfred Paschall and John McQuade |
| A grave-digger             | Rhys Williams                    |
| Second grave-digger        | Henry Jones                      |
| A priest                   | Walter Williams                  |
| Oric                       | Maury Tuckerman                  |
| Ambassadors                | George Keane and Emmett Rogers   |

significant things are, again, Mr. Evans's she playing and the great majesty of the play itself as it is thus enroled at full length before you. Four hours is a small enough sacrifice for such rewards.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, December 5, 1939

## Maurice Evans as Hamlet Returns from Tour

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

MR. MAURICE EVANS returned to the New York scene last night with his exalted interpretation of Shakespeare's Hamlet intact. The full-length production comes back to us for a limited engagement at the 44th Street Theater untarnished by its long tour through the country and as vivid and fresh in all its color as the day it left us. There has been no slacking off, no falling away in the intensity of the acting. There is no observable tendency towards laxness. It is the same triumphant theater Mr. Evans introduced to us in October, 1938.

There are, to be sure, a few changes in the cast, but none that in any way change the tone of the production, and in the main the good company is happily unmarked by desertions. Miss Mady Christians remains as the Queen. Mr. Henry Edwards once more gives us his highly impressive interpretation of Claudius. Miss Katherine Locke is once more a moving and touching Ophelia, and Sydney Smith a confident and accomplished Laertes.

It seemed to me last night, although this may be pure imagination, that Mr. Evans gave us an even stronger and more purposeful Hamlet than he did a year ago. His portrayal is most certainly a vigorous denial

that the Prince was either melancholy, mad, or even mentally confused. The method in his madness was sharply delineated, the logic of his movements clear. It also seemed to me, however, that he was under the straining necessity of forcing his voice to do his bidding, and that that wonderful instrument showed some signs of rebelling against the continuous exactions. Mr. Evans has put upon it this last year. Its power, however, is unimpaired, and the more impassioned scenes, such as the violent closet dialogue

with the queen-mother found it put to magnificent use.

There have been a few changes in the spirited settings provided by David Folkess, but the impressiveness of the original designs has been retained and, in certain instances, improved. The grave scene, for one, has a noteworthy grandeur that I fail to remember as a part of the original production.

From the audience standpoint, this has become a more comfortable evening. True, you cannot observe a fashionable dinner hour, and arrive in time to see the first six of the 20 scenes. Mr. Evans sends up his curtain promptly at 7:30 o'clock, and there are two intermissions of 12 minutes each before the final curtain at 11:30. Instead of the long "dinner period" allowed last year. The general effect of this is salutary, for it seems to keep away those who have no real interest in the theater, and thus allow room for those who have a genuine love for it.

There are a number of excellent performances in addition to those of Mr. Evans. Miss Christians and Mr. Edwards. Raymond Johnson's Polonius is a witty characterization of the garrulous old busybody. Rhys Williams, doubling as the Player King and the First Grave-digger, gives hearty portrayals, particularly in the latter part. Sydney Smith continues to grow in acting stature, and Donald Randolph repeats his success as Horatio.

With the full-length Hamlet once more in competition with the many bright and modern successes that have been given us this season, the Broadway theatrical scene is becoming perfectly balanced. If you saw the play, so brilliantly staged by Miss Margaret Webster and so brilliantly produced by Mr. Evans last year, you will want to see it again. If you didn't, you should not set aside some evening during these next five weeks to see it, for you may never look upon its equal again.



# "Hamlet"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, December 5, 1939

## Maurice Evans Brings Back His Uncut 'Hamlet' for a Limited Engagement

By BROOKS ATKINSON

WHAT a wonderful play it is! When Maurice Evans first produced the uncut "Hamlet" a little more than a year ago we were all gratefully penning paeans in praise of it. Last evening he brought it back to the Forty-fourth Street Theatre for a limited engagement. What was written in this place last year might as well be repeated. Opinions may reasonably differ as to the brilliance of Mr. Evans's acting of the central part, for some great actors have left their imprint on that immortal role.

But no one who is aware of the grandeur of the play as a whole will deny that

the uncut version, ably staged by Margaret Webster, is a sweeping and memorable experience in the theatre. Mr. Evans plays his part with great strength, honesty and rounded intelligence, restoring "Hamlet" to the theatre for which Shakespeare wrote it. As long as we live, theatregoers of this generation will be in debt to him for the first revelation of Shakespeare's many-sided genius as a working dramatist.

Some of the bardolaters object to suggestions that Shakespeare is usually made difficult for people who are not bardolaters at heart. But the fact remains that "Hamlet," cut to the usual dimensions of an evening in the theatre, destroys the logic of the story, especially after the players' scene before the king and queen. In his present schedule Mr. Evans raises the curtain at 7:30, and, excepting the two intermissions,

keeps it up for about four hours. Played thus with all the involutions of plot preserved, it is interesting to see how the dramatic tragedy fills out, how much excitement the rhythm of the story engenders, how much stature the characters acquire, and how overwhelming the big scenes become. When the whole groundwork of the drama is laid in the uncut performance, the players' scene before the king and queen is tumultuously furious, the parting scene between Hamlet and Ophelia is brimming over with tragic poignancy, and the scene between Hamlet and his mother in her chamber is shot through with a kind of incandescent anguish.

Give the actors credit, too. For Mr. Evans has played fair to the drama not only by using the whole text but by rounding up a

full company of dramatic actors and encouraging them to play the parts to the top of their bent. Mady Christian's frightened, tortured, grieving queen is the best one this theatregoer has ever seen; Katherine Locke's Ophelia takes top ranking, also. Henry Edwards's king is a very model of bland assurance, cupidity and alarm. Although Rhys Williams's first grave-digger is inferior to Whitford Kane's; as the first player he reads better than any one in recent memory; and the part of the ghost was never better read than by John Barclay.

Taking the place of George Graham, who died, alas, in Chicago after creating a Polonius of great humor, Raymond Johnson is now playing another Polonius of equal though individual merit. In the interests of humor he wears spectacles loose on his nose, like a Yankee storekeeper. After consulting the encyclopedia *Tecumseh* has just reported that spectacles were invented by the time of the fifteenth century. Shakespeare must have known about them; let the academic question of anachronism pass. For the chief fact is that Mr. Johnson's fussy, pottering, pedantic acting of Polonius is richly amusing.

Mr. Evans takes pride in having plucked Hamlet out of the psychiatry books and restored him to the stage where he began his Shakespearean career. It is a deed of mercy worth applauding, for his Hamlet is an interpretation sweetened by common sense, alert, aware, gentlemanly, passionate and commanding. Last year Mr. Evans drove his voice beyond its natural compass. After long experience with the exacting task of acting a tremendous part, he now uses it with a greater sense of ease and beauty. No one can surpass the clarity of his word articulation or the intelligibility of the lines and phrases as he reads them. He is a player of wit and ferocity, of range and versatility and of superb lucidity. With Miss Webster's swiftly paced direction he is leading the most dramatic performance of Shakespeare's "Hamlet" this theatregoer has ever seen. In short, bravo!

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, December 5, 1939

## Hamlet Returns

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IT CAN now be said categorically that Maurice Evans's production of "Hamlet" is just as brilliant and exciting as all of us thought it was when we saw it for the first time last year. Returning for a five-weeks' stay after a gratifying successful road tour, this full-length version of the most famous of plays demonstrates anew that Mr. Evans is the finest Shakespearean actor of our time and that his presentation of the First Drama, again beautifully staged by Miss Margaret Webster, is one of the great productions of the modern theater. "Hamlet" becomes a wonderful and exhilarating show as well as the most distinguished of plays, under the human and imaginative treatment that Mr. Evans and Miss Webster have arranged for it, and one of the great experiences of playgoing is offered once more in all its magnificence. If the foregoing seems to contain quite a number of superlatives, then I can only say that this "Hamlet" deserves them, just as it did last season.

Since so much has already been said about the star's performance, it might be just as well to say something first about the playing of the members of the supporting cast. Miss Katherine Locke is appearing again as Ophelia, but for this week only, and I, for one, will be sorry when she departs. For she has become one of the most human and touching of Ophelias, achieving a simple tenderness that is even finer than that which she captured in her portrayal last year. Again Hen-

ry Edwards makes the king not the mere melodramatic villain that so many actors have tended to make him, but a credible and strangely sympathetic human being, suffering real pangs of conscience for his crime and honestly in love with his regal wife. Miss Mady Christians still is remarkably fine as the queen, playing the closet scene with Hamlet to particular perfection. I miss the late George Graham as Polonius, but Raymond Johnson is excellent in the part, while Rhys Williams, as the player king, and John Barclay, as the ghost, are extremely successful. Donald Randolph, I think, has improved as Horatio since last season.

As for Mr. Evans's portrayal, it remains the ablest and most satisfying rendition of

the epic role seen in New York since John Barrymore's historic performance. Again he makes the unhappy prince not a white-faced, hysterical neurotic, but a vigorous, virile man caught up in a net of circumstances that brought out all the bitterness and all the contradictions in his subtle character. Not since Mr. Barrymore has any Hamlet so captured the sardonic humor and the inherent capacity for gaiety in the man or the qualities of rollicking fellowship that make comprehensible his student days at Wittenberg. If the Evans portrayal lacks some of the biting Barrymore brilliance, it seems to me, on the other hand, to possess a more even and consistent quality than his predecessor offered. Once more Mr. Evans shows us his enormous gift for combining the incomparable eloquence of the role with its dramatic effectiveness, enabling us to enjoy Shakespeare in his double capacity of poet and dramatist.

It was pointed out last year that the uncut "Hamlet" is so much more effective and understandable than the customary edited edition that, when it is properly performed, it doesn't even seem any longer than the sheared version. I can only repeat the contention and give it added support. Even such usually enigmatic Shakespearean figures as Fortinbras and the cloak-and-suit team of Rosencrans and Guildenstern take on for the first time a comprehensible life of their own, adding much to the completeness of the play. What is the finest thing of all about the Evans production is that it accepts "Hamlet" as a living and intensely exciting drama, not as either a self-conscious literary classic or as a mere vehicle for an actor. In addition to being the greatest play in world dramatic literature, it becomes the exciting show that it was intended to be. Obviously it is an event in any dramatic season in which it appears.

# "Morning's at Seven"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, December 1, 1939

## 'Morning's at Seven,' a Gentle Comedy, Is Offered at the Longacre

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

WE MUST be tender today with Paul Osborn's "Morning's at Seven," which opened last evening at the Longacre Theater. It is a play for sipping, and a report on it should be served in the most delicate Haviland, with the sugar lumps dropped in delicately. No sturdy words should be allowed to come near Mr. Osborn's play. The jar of their passage might well prove fatal. And it would be a pity to harm so warmly funny a little play.

It is not a play in which anything happens, and this presents a reviewer with an immediate problem. After three acts a maiden lady of sixty-odd moves across a back yard, shifting her place of residence from the home of one married sister to that of another. At about the same time a home boy of 40 decides that he may safely marry a patient girl of 39, thus ending an engagement of a mere seven years. They had been going together for five years, of course, before they embarked on engagement. The audience finds it a little difficult to believe that, toward the end of the engagement, they anticipated a trifle, and so do the other characters in the play.

The other characters are all in their sixties or seventies. They frequent the back yards between two equally elderly houses of a small town—houses which Jo Mielziner has built out of excruciatingly accurate

memories. Mr. Osborn has built the dialogue out of the same material. Or somewhere he has hidden himself, and listened to small-town talk; watched elderly women forgetting to pretend propriety when they are by themselves; heard the little gossip of the neighborhood. To go with them he has imagined a man who has "spells," during which he leans his head against a tree and wonders about the meaning of it all and announces that he must "go back to the fork."

It is hard to give the flavor of this, and "Morning's at Seven" is all flavor. It is a minor triumph of selective reporting. Every cliché is astoundingly right, and placed for

### 'MORNING'S AT SEVEN'

A comedy in three acts by Paul Osborn; directed by Joshua Logan; setting by Jo Mielziner; presented on November 29, 1939, at the Longacre Theater by Dwight Deere Wiman. The cast: Theodore Swanson... Thomas Chalmers Cora Swanson... Jean Adair Aaronetta Gibbs... Dorothy Gish Ida Bolton... Kate McComb Carl Bolton... Russell Collins Homer Bolton... John Alexander Myrtle Brown... Enid Markey Esther Crampton... Effie Shannon David Crampton... Herbert Yost

sally comedy. Each inflection of the writing and of the playing, is so accurate that it starts a freshest of memories. But "freshest" is too active a word. "Morning's at Seven" trickles. It is always gently delightful, never painfully absorbing. If you expect the wrong lounge of it—like drama, for example—it may be rather irritating. But it is soothing. If you take it as a leisurely saunter through human idiosyncrasy, made with a guide whose only comment is an appreciative smile. Now and then the smile is a little wry, because these old folks have their reminiscent troubles and jealousies and little remembered heartaches. But God's in His heaven, as Browning said in the rest of the stanza, and all's right with the world.

All is very right with the casting, too. You cannot pick any of the actors out for special praise because it is impossible to see how any part could have been better played. Dorothy Gish is a delight, and so is Jean Adair. But they are no better, certainly, than Thomas Chalmers, Kate McComb, Russell Collins, John Alexander, Enid Markey, Effie Shannon and Herbert Yost. Nobody could be better than any of these, or gentler than their play.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, December 1, 1939

## Old Folks at Home

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IF BY any chance you are a little tired of the younger generation, you certainly can get far away from it by a visit to "Morning's at Seven." There the grandfathers and the grandmothers are bounding about with their joys and sorrows spread out for your inspection, and the boy and girl of the fable are hovering dangerously in the vicinity of forty. Youth is the furthest thing from their concern, and there may be one or two recalcitrants in the audience who will start yearning for the ingenuities and juvenilities again. If, however, you are interested in the human adventures of people in the twilight of their lives, "Morning's at Seven" provides many touching and humorous episodes, characters and observations sprinkled with considerable effectiveness in a play that too often suffers from the garrulousness and the crotchets of old age.

Despite the gift for humorous observation and the frequently tender feeling that brighten Mr. Paul Osborn's play, there is a bleak and frigid air about it which is sometimes just a trifle too barren for comfort. Something of the ashes of dead hope and desire seems to lie heavily upon it. "Morning's at Seven" is at its best when it departs from the melancholia of age and the fabrications of story telling and begins really to look about at its characters

and the way they behave. Shy people attempting a conversation or an amiable but not altogether bright girl of forty-odd trying to enliven a family gathering provides Mr. Osborn with material that he handles delightfully. Some of his ancient characters, too, are presented with much humorous insight, and all of his people have a true air of reality about them. In his narrative, however, he often takes far too long to pass any given point, and then the air of bleakness descends once more.

In the main, "Morning's at Seven" is a play of people looking back with varying degrees of bitterness on the life that has passed them

by. The attempts of the younger couple of the play to start in upon marriage at forty provide some of the plot structure, but the work is concerned chiefly with their elders. The setting is the two back yards of adjoining houses, where three of four sisters of fading years live with considerable placidity, despite one or two things. For all is not completely well with the four Gibbs sisters. The unmarried one has in her far-away youth had a brief affair with the husband of her sister, and the other sisters suspect it of being even worse than it really was. A third sister has a husband who fancies himself as an intellectual and is unpleasant to her relatives, and the other is married to a man who enjoys regarding himself as a failure. All the material seems to be there for a fairly tragic evening, but Mr. Osborn, who found death pretty funny in "On Borrowed Time," looks upon the problems of his elders as comedy. It must be said for him that often he makes it seem as if it were.

If the play seems to me to get into the doldrums more frequently than it should, I can at least recommend the acting highly. Miss Enid Markey, who was once W. S. Hart's leading woman in those silent Western films, gives an uncommonly touching and humorous performance as the youngest heroine of the cast, playing with great insight and truth the nice girl who isn't very bright. The Misses Jean Adair, Dorothy Gish, Kate McComb and Effie Shannon are excellent as the sisters, and Russell Collins, Thomas Chalmers and Herbert Yost are admirable as the husbands. Then, too, there is a characteristically engaging portrait of the juvenile of the tale by the reliable John Alexander. "Morning's at Seven" is filled with human beings observed in human situations, but its drabness is too inherent and its talkativeness is too great for proper effectiveness.

# "Morning's at Seven"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, December 1, 1939

## "Morning's at Seven" Adds One More Good Comedy to the List

"Morning's at Seven," comedy by Paul Osborn. Produced by Dwight Deere Wiman at the Longacre Theatre, New York, Nov. 30, 1939.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

LIFE with the Swansons and the Boltons, not to mention the Cramptons, in "Morning's at Seven," opening at the Longacre Theatre last night, is almost as hilarious as life with father at the Empire. Almost, but not quite.

This new comedy by Paul Osborn is also a pleasant whimsy about pleasant people who grow old as gracefully as may be and pause for a moment to discuss a bit of family scandal that, at their age, is more laughable than serious and a little pathetic withal.

There are four sisters, and two have lived next door to each other for forty-five years. Aaronetta is a spinster and has made her home with Cora Swanson, with Cora only suspecting that Aaronetta has loved "Thor" Swanson, her husband, slyly all the time.

Ida Bolton is the one next door with a queer, frustrated husband and a 46-year-old boob of a son who has been threatening to cut the apron strings that tie him to home and mother for seven or eight years and marry Myrtle, but without ever mustering the courage.

### The Little One

The crucial family episode that the play reveals in the Swanson-Bolton lives is that

in which Myrtle Brown, a pretty nitwit, helps Homer Bolton make up his mind to marry her by revealing a secret to him that he has not suspected.

It seems such an incredible secret that the family as well as the audience is thrown into mild hysterics, which brings everything to the amusing end of a happy theatre evening.

You who remember Mr. Osborn's "Vinegar Tree" and "On Borrowed Time" know something of the easy flow of the Osborn humor. It is never exciting, usually agreeably unexpected, and generally magnificently and wholesomely human.

Dwight Deere Wiman has helped the author tremendously by the careful casting of "Morning's at Seven." This is casting to type with a vengeance. With Effie Shannon, Jean Adair and Kate McComb to play three of the sisters, and Dorothy Gish, marvelously recreated under wig and make-up, to play the fourth, who is the unhappy and lightly vixenish Aaronetta, the quartet is perfect.

### In Character

These are not rasping crones, nor doddering grannies, but lively girls grown old and taking their late sixties in stride. Simple minded old girls who can accept a family scandal and have a good deal of fun with it without ever letting it get out of the backyard.

The men are as perfectly fitted—big John Alexander to play the slow-witted Homer; the worried Russell Collins for the frustrated one who riddles life into a series of what the folks think are fits; spare, ascetic Herbert Yost for the over-educated professor who floundered into a pocket, and hearty Tom Chalmers for the spare room Lothario of forgotten years.

And again the perfect choice in Enid Markey for the Myrtle who is just too awfully interested but doesn't retain very well nor understand very much more than that every woman has to snare her own husband in the end.

A Mielisner setting of a couple of New Haven, or perhaps Schenectady, back porches furnishes a proper and effective background.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, December 1, 1939

## Paul Osborn's 'Morning's at Seven,' a Comedy of American Family Life in a Small Town

By BROOKS ATKINSON

PAUL OSBORN, who dramatized "On Borrowed Time," continues his investigation of small-town affairs in "Morning's at Seven," which was acted at the Longacre last evening. Out of respect for the droll quality of his humor it is possible to wish that he had written a sturdier and ampler comedy on a stouter framework. But since that is wishing for the moon in the present instance we may as well content ourselves with enjoying what he has accomplished, which is considerable. Out of the commonplaceness of family relations he has created delightfully comic characters, pushed them gently into ludicrous situations and, without resorting to gags,

he has written genuinely comic lines for them to speak. It is original, simple, generally pleasant and sometimes heartily amusing. If Mr. Osborn will do himself the favor of cutting twenty minutes out of his sketchbook, "Morning's at Seven" may be enjoyed without tedious reservations.

It is backyard drollery. Serving as scene designer, Jo Mielisner has set the piece perfectly by filling the stage with the rear porches and facades of two McKinley period houses after the pungent style of Burchfield. In the

house to the left lives a couple in their sixties with the unmarried sister of the wife. In the house to the right lives a couple in their sixties with a son about 40. Backstage somewhere lives another aged couple. Since all the women are sisters every one is related and every one is up to his ears in every one else's business.

Although Mr. Osborn is not writing satire he is sufficiently detached to chuckle over the

homely grotesqueries of neighborhood life and to recognize the pathos of old age that is filled with regret and old age that feels homeless. Nothing much of cosmic proportions happens to any one, but sometimes the family eccentricities seem enormous. The 40-year-old son has brought his intended to his parents' home after a courtship that has been going on regularly six or seven years. According to backyard standards a most intimately related neighbors, that takes on the proportions of a momentous event. It is also mixed up with a father who has "spells" of wondering what has become of his life, a crotchety scholar who decides that he and his wife had better live on separate floors hereafter, a wife who decides after forty years or so that she and her husband are not going to be encumbered with her sister any longer and other domestic irritants. Since they are in their sixties the folks in this play ought to be settled down into some sort of mutual agreement. But it is the genius of Mr. Osborn's comedy to present them as rebellious, petulant and foolishly discontented.

Joshua Logan has directed it in the familiar style, preserving the sentiment under the humor. It is acted in tones of contrast by a cast of affable actors—Russell Collins, Dorothy Gish and Thomas Chalmers giving the keenest notions of character amid the oldsters, and Enid Markey and John Alexander making something very funny out of the pair of ripened suitors. "Morning's at Seven" is not so much casual as tenuous, for Mr. Osborn is content just to keep the ball rolling at times. But his insight into the gaucheries of old age is unconventional and his humor is original and friendly. At its best his drollery is immensely funny. It is pure comedy in the vein of American folkways.

Note to the janitor: A little less heat during these warm weather months, please. An audience likes to be partially warmed by the play.



# "Morning's at Seven"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, December 1, 1939

## Dorothy Gish Seen in "Morning's at Seven"

Dwight Deere Wiman Presents Paul Osborn's New Comedy  
at the Longacre

By JOHN MASON BROWN

LET me be fair. There were those last night at the Longacre who seemed to be having a very good time at Paul Osborn's "Morning's at Seven." They were laughing heartily. And they kept their heads erect until the final curtain fell very close to twenty minutes past eleven. But much as I enjoyed Mr. Osborn's "The Vinegar Tree" and "On Borrowed Time," and much as I looked forward to "Morning's at Seven," I must admit his backyard portrait of family life failed, except at rare moments; to give me the pleasure I kept hoping it would provide.

I wanted to like it. Even though it would not let me do so, I tried again and again to make friends with it. But it put me off and kept me off during the major portion of a long evening, in spite of my admiration for most of the acting and for Jo Mielziner's almost painfully realistic representation of two closely adjoining frame houses, back porches, screen doors, second stories, gutters, flower beds, et al.

What left me in the lonely position of Maine and Vermont was not only my unhappiness because of many of the broader, utterly superficial values of Mr. Osborn's writing, but because of my growing suspicion that this time he had little or nothing to say and was taking an unconscionable time saying it.

**The Four Sisters**  
I found it hard to determine whether or not in his microscopic picture of the home life of four elderly American sisters in a small town, Mr. Osborn was dashing off an unedited vaudeville, going in for funny paper realism, or attempting quite seriously—in spite of the interruptions of two younger comers—to let these adults discover where they were going in life and what they stood for.

If my confusion ended up in mild boredom, it was not because I did not appreciate the fidelity of some of Mr. Osborn's touches, both humorous and pathetic. It was merely be-

cause Mr. Osborn seldom permitted me to care about his people and their difficulties.

To be sure he had presented his tangled situation with meticulous detail. Three of his four sisters are married. One is the mother of a bashful boy of forty who at last summons nerve enough to propose to the Bromide Bessie he had miraculously got into trouble. This sister's husband is a bulker given to those attacks of the "cosmics" known as spells. Another sister is the wife of a professor who with reason looks down on his in-laws as morons and tries to keep his wife and her family apart. The third sister has been robbed of a real home for her husband and herself because for half a century she has sheltered a spinster sister who once, years and years ago, had a secret affair with her husband.

**More Snail Than Lark**

These interwoven lives, with their real estate complications finally settled so that all is supposed to be right with the world, are Osborn's concern. He shows his families springing from back-porch to back-porch. He eavesdrops on their gossip. He records their smallest small talk. He lets his elderly sisters and their husbands and his young people prattle on and on, at one moment in what is meant to be a poignant manner and for the next five minutes in comic strip terms. But so injun-giving (because so confused) is his treatment, that I, for one, found it almost as hard to sympathize with his characters as I did to laugh at them.

Although I wanted, and tried, to like them, they wound up for me by being bores in spite of the truly capable homespun way in which they were played by Thomas Chalmers, Jean Adair, John Alexander, Enid Markay, Russell Collins, Effie Shannon, and, above all, Dorothy Gish. I found I could not blame Joshua Logan for the uncertainties in his direction of a play that seemed to be pursuing truth in one scene and then suddenly began trailing the Katzenjammers in the next two. My fear is that "Morning's at Seven" is all surface and no depth. Although it convinced me that the snail was on the thorn, it never quite persuaded me that the lark was on the wing, where I kept hoping it would be.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, December 1, 1939

## Morning's at Seven Bows to Chuckles

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

PAUL OSBORN, who translated Lawrence Watkins' novel, *On Borrowed Time*, into dramatic terms so successfully, some 18 months ago, gives us another, but rather more sedate, picture of small town life in America, in his *Morning's at Seven*, which was given its premiere last night at the Longacre Theater.

His portrait is faithful, his characters are alive, and his atmosphere is authentic, but the work, pleasant as it is, lacks the imaginative qualities and the astonishing humor that made the former presentation so charming. *Morning's at Seven* is a comedy for those who want to go to the theater in a contemplative mood, rather than in the quest for excitement. For there it will afford an agreeable evening, not marked by boisterous laughter, but punctuated by chuckles.

Jo Mielziner's setting, the back yards of two adjacent houses built with all the gingerbread trimmings of the late Victorian period, tell, in fact, almost all there is to tell about Mr. Osborn's people. When the curtain rises you are immediately aware that under these mansard roofs are two groups of people identical in their thinking, identical in their desires, identical in their little rebellions against convention, and identical in their final obedience to small-town custom and their inability to escape from it.

Mr. Osborn goes Anton Chekhov one better by giving us four sisters instead of three. Three of the sisters, Cora, Ida and Esther, are comfortably if not entirely happily married. The fourth, Aaronetta, has lived a repressed life for many years in the home of her sister, Cora, and Cora's husband, Theodore. During all these years she has hugged to her bosom both the glory and the shame of having once loved Theodore, and the burden of Mr. Osborn's plot appears to be the exposure of this scandal without injuring either the reputation or the feelings of those concerned in it.

As a secondary problem, Mr. Osborn gives us two young people who have undergone the tortures of a seven-year courtship in the course of which they have succumbed to certain natural instincts, and who are naively surprised to discover that the penalty is inevitable parenthood. Let it be said that Mr. Osborn's New Englanders (if they are New Englanders) accept this situation with less evidence of shock than one would expect to find north of the Connecticut border.

The difficulties are all pleasantly solved by the end of the third act, the young couple are on their way to be wedded and the married sisters are reunited to their lawful husbands after one act in which it appeared that they were about to lose them.

If the play, in itself, has little importance, it does at least afford a splendid cast opportunities for delightful characterization. Dorothy Gish is the frustrated spinster, and she moves easily through situations that call for many expressions of suppressed emotion. Enid Markay deserves the highest of tributes for her witty handling of the role of the dumb but ever-so-willing bride, and the play gains in comedy interest whenever she is on the stage. Effie Shannon does nothing to dim her reputation for sparkling portrayals, and Russell Collins is happily cast in the part of a married man who is trying to find out the secret of life and who has recurrent fits of depression in the process.

John Alexander, who last appeared on Broadway disguised in the clothes of a certain newspaper columnist (in *Kiss the Boys Goodbye*) gives a properly wide-eyed interpretation of the hesitant lover, and Jean Adair, Thomas Chalmers, Kate McComb and Herbert Yost beautifully fulfill all the demands of the script.

*Morning's at Seven* will create no great stir, but no one who sees it will regard the evening as wasted.

# "Farm of Three Echoes"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, November 29, 1939

## 'Farm of Three Echoes' and Ethel Barrymore Have a Grand Time

"Farm of Three Echoes," drama by Noel Langley. Produced by Victor Payne-Jennings in association with Arthur Hopkins at the Cort Theatre, New York, Nov. 28, 1939.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

THERE are two invitations held out to you at the Cort Theatre, where Ethel Barrymore began an engagement in "Farm of Three Echoes" last night. One is from Miss Barrymore herself to come and see her in another of her studies in amusing senility; the other is one from Victor Payne-Jennings and Arthur Hopkins to come and enjoy yourself at one of those good old theatre pieces that is shot with dead men's tales and live men's shivers.

"Farm of Three Echoes," written by Noel Langley, a South African dramatist who has also done a bit of announcing for the African Broadcasting company, is a story of three generations of family hatred in the Boer country that is as replete with theatre effects as the author and his directors could make it.

Miss Barrymore plays old Ouma Gerart, 77 years old and still at a match at wits for her son and grandson, and more than a match for a couple of townfolk who drift in thinking to buy the Gerart farm and make and airport of it.

Good Fun

This Ouma Gerart role, I think, is more

fun, both for Miss Barrymore and her loyal followers, than was her old lady Whiteoak of last season. Ouma has humor, and Ethel does on humor. Ouma is an old smart, feisty as a tax dodger but sly, too, and as stubborn as a Gerart would be after countless generations on the South African veldt. She wags her head and smiles a kind of imitation toothless smile and it is a joy to watch as she toys with the technique of her trade and revels in the response of her audience.

Ouma hated her husband because he was a good deal of a beast. She found a way to be rid of him by slipping a load into a gun he was cleaning.

Ouma's daughter, Lisha, also hated Isaac, her husband, because he accused her of goings-on with a Britisher. When she could stand him no longer she cut his saddle girth and he pitched over his horse's head and broke his neck.

Jan's Different

So now came Jan Gerart, with the curse upon him, and he married to little Naomi deMeer, with her hair in two braids and her eyes wide with wonder and all. Jan decided he had best put Naomi from him before she, too, came to hate the Gerarts and put something in his coffee.

It didn't work out that way entirely. The last night's first-nighters seemed to extract a good deal of entertainment from it.

Miss Barrymore, as reported, is off on another season of fun in makeup. Mr. Jennings should have kept her out of town until February or March probably, but this way she can stay here until the holiday trade is spent and then travel west. They will be liking her wherever she plays. She puts a good deal of art and a fine spirit into the playing of these trembling ancients. They are a Barrymore rather than a natural breed, but they're good acting parts.

McKay Morris has a moment with whiskers and a vile temper, before mother gets rid of him. He's good enough to make you glad he's gone for good when he leaves. Dean Jagger is weighted with foggy heroics, but makes the best of them.

Ann Deere, I thought, does a particularly good job as Isaac's beaten woman. Priscilla Newton is appealingly innocent as the child-wife, and Nancy Sheridan properly wanton as a would-be temptress.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, November 29, 1939

## Farm of Three Echoes, a Weird Play, at Cort

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

IT is a weird play in which Ethel Barrymore is enjoying herself and entertaining her friends at the Cort Theater, and it is not difficult to guess why Miss Barrymore, with the connivance of Victor Payne-Jennings and Arthur Hopkins, chose it for her 1939 production.

Farm of Three Echoes, the play by Noel Langley in which she opened last night, has as its central figure another Granny Whiteoaks. Miss Barrymore's year-long success with the old lady of Jalma undoubtedly had considerable influence in her selection, although it must be said that between the dowager of the Whiteoaks clan and the half-mad and ghost-ridden bedlam of the South African Gerart family, the former makes far the preferable companion.

Miss Barrymore's transition from last year's characterization to this has been accomplished by slicing five years from her age. Mme. Gerart being a mere 77, against Grandma Whiteoak's 102. It has also meant exchanging an alert and cunning, if slightly eccentric, mentality for that of the cloudy senility that lives in the past and that constantly sees little men that are not there. Beyond that, it exchanges a grandam who finds joy in a forbidden glass of wine, for one who finds satisfaction largely in happy contemplation of her own coffin, bought 29 years ago, lined with watered silk, and treasured jealously in the attic.

Playwright Langley, adopting this strange figure for his protagonist, has gone to some pains to trace the madness in the Gerart family, and to show that while all the males in it have been unconscionable brutes, all the females have been cheerful murderers. At least, as far back as Grandma Gerart's day, which is as far as he has uncovered this rather frightening lineage. He wants, however, to see Grandson Jan Gerart escape the blight and, with the unwitting aid of Grandma, he finally succeeds in that worthy purpose. Jan settles down, at the final curtain, to what we hope will be a comparatively sane and happy life with his little bride, but not until the old lady has fired a lusty charge from her fowling piece into the phantom

Satan who has been prowling about in her consciousness.

The mechanics of this lurid business are well carried out, and there is a sufficient number of ghost stories, banging doors and hands rattling the latch at the proper moment to provide an adequate number of cold chills in anybody's spine. There is suspense aplenty, as well, for you never know just what Grandma may take it into her fuddled old head to do with that blunderbus, and you can never feel quite easy being in the same room with a woman who has cut the girth of her husband's saddle so that he will fall off and break his neck, and another who has prodded her son into doing a grisly and lethal piece of business with his father some years ago, down in the old barn.

Miss Barrymore's treatment of the partly mad and partly psychic old lady is exactly what you would expect from Miss Barrymore. The thrilling and throaty intonations there, and you are treated to a characteristic smacking of lips and talking through closed teeth common to Ethel and her brother Lionel. Her other mannerisms to illustrate advanced age are much the same as they were in Whiteoaks. She is not pained, but there is a great deal of nodding and shaking of the head and mumbled soliloquy in clever imitation of the bodily and mental infirmities that afflict most centenarians.

Dean Jagger, who made such an admirable Jesse James in the unfortunate Missouri Legend, gives a handsome and impressive performance of Jan Gerart. Ann Deere, a fugitive from the Tobacco Road gang, seems merely to have swapped the morbidity of Ada Lester for that of Lisha Gerart. Jan's mother, but in the process she has been cured of the hookworm, and can therefore display considerable fire in her new performance.

Farm of Three Echoes is a dour kind of comedy, relieved but not quite saved by the Barrymore touch. I cannot believe that it will find the warm reception accorded its predecessor.

# "Farm of Three Echoes"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, November 29, 1939

## 'Farm of Three Echoes,' With Miss Barrymore Opens at the Cort Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

A MIGHTY evil wind blows across the South African veldt in "Farm of Three Echoes," which opened at the Cort Theater last evening, and a chuckling old crone dominates situations with a shotgun. A family curse also is present, and a seductress from the city appears to storm the virtue of the stalwart countryman. This brings us close to stark folk drama, but Miss Ethel Barrymore wards that danger off. She is the antique grandmother of the Gerart clan, which farms in the Orange Free State. She is wicked and unpredictable, and maunders when it suits her purpose. She lives in constant expectation that Satan will drop in, and takes afternoon naps in her coffin. It is more than likely that she conspired in the killing of her husband and she beams contentedly when her daughter-in-law polishes off the next of the Gerarts. She is quite an old girl, and the pungency of Miss Barrymore's brilliant acting gives her depth and breadth and often violently comical life. She is also about three-fourths of "Farm of Three Echoes," which the author, Noel Langley, may have taken a thought more seriously. Mr. Langley probably was scared by a veldt in early life. He has put some pretty grim stuff in his

play at any rate. All the Gerart men are roaring bullies, each in turn arousing hatred in his son and each being killed by his wife. During the period of the play, Isaac is eliminated by his Lisha. His son Jan, understandably alarmed by the family history, marries a schoolgirl, but holds himself aloof from her in fear that the ancestral curse will overtake them both. Doors open mysteriously and grama sees ghosts, but these are not those who abhor ghosts on the stage will be pleased to learn, visible to the audience.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, November 29, 1939

## Ethel Barrymore Seen in "Farm of Three Echoes"

With Dean Jagger and McKay Morris She Acts Mr. Langley's Melodrama

By JOHN MASQON BROWN

THE ovation Ethel Barrymore received when the curtain fell on "Farm of Three Echoes" at the Cort last night was both heart-warming and deserved. As a gun-toting, ghost-seeing, time-adding granny of ninety-seven (something of a Shirley Temple compared to the grandmother she played in "Whiteoaks"), Miss Barrymore was not only having a field day but providing one.

She was acting with such relish, using her magical voice with such effect, nodding her head with such humorous satisfaction, and bringing such energy and distinction to her characterization that one hated to see her leave the stage at all. As a matter of fact, she should never have been allowed to do so. She should have been chained to her high chair by the fire while she burbled on magnificently about her coffin, lined with watered silk, which had been her proud possession upstairs for thirty-nine years; about Kruger and his white horse; about her sons lost in the Boer War; about airplanes and city folk; about Satan and the Whore of Babylon; and about the proud, hard, villainous Gerarts (the men of her family, drat 'em) who, though they had been cruel to their women, had never shamed their blood.

In any other hands, or more accurately in any other throat, Noel Langley's South African melodrama would have been shown up as the arrant, often boring, hokum plied on hokum that it is. But Miss Barrymore, while not exactly keeping its true quality a secret, manages whenever she is on the stage (which is during most of the evening) to turn "Farm of Three Echoes" into the kind of picnic in a makeup box which one

not only forgives but for which one is grateful.

### Hitting Below the Veldt

Mr. Langley's little number is really a South African "Sun-Up." It is a mountain drama subject to all the laying on of local color with a trowel to which mountain dramas are heir. It is fed with the same "folk-play" quaint talk. It is supposedly warmed by the same invasion of the usual evil city woman, even if it is laid on a mountain range where the hill folks go in for "Guma's" and "Gumpha's." Instead of "Pappy's" and "Ma's." But if you picked it, as is irresistible, it most assuredly would not bleed because there is no real life in it.

In all honesty "Farm of Three Echoes" must be admitted to be more than merely a mountain play; however South African. It is also an ivory soap ghost story which refuses to float. It hits below the veldt again and

### 'FARM OF THREE ECHOES'

Play in three acts by Noel Langley. Staged by Arthur Hopkins. Setting by Cirkler and Robbins. Presented at the Cort Theater on November 28, 1939, by Victor Payne-Jennings in association with Mr. Hopkins. The cast:  
Ouma Gerart.....Ethel Barrymore  
Lisha Gerart.....Ann Dere  
Jan Gerart.....Dean Jagger  
Isaac Gerart.....McKay Morris  
Saul Portenaar.....Eduard Frass  
Logenhoofen.....Victor Esker  
Naomi de Meester.....Priscilla Newton  
Dyke Hesse.....John Griggs  
Marie Hesse.....Nancy Sheridan

A city couple comes to buy the farm and the girl, a veritable hussy, makes passes. But grandma fixes all that. When grandma scares people they stay scared.

Mr. Langley hasn't defined this very sharply and now and then the impending horrors grow faintly comical. But there is nothing the matter with any of it when Miss Barrymore is on the stage, glinting wickedly and speaking forthrightly and taking no nonsense from any one. Dean Jagger and Priscilla Newton personify the troubled love interest very nicely; McKay Morris is fear-some in a brief appearance as Isaac—after which he probably spends the rest of the evening getting out of his hair. Lisha Gerart is properly subdued as a Gerart woman and Nancy Sheridan is appropriately seductive.

It isn't much of a play, maybe, but it is beautifully supplied with Miss Barrymore and very ably acted by every one.

again. And it uses all the old spooks-blowing open-the-door tricks at just the right moment which have been allowed to drop into a respected disuse for many seasons.

The point is, however, that whenever Miss Barrymore is around one is willing to forgive even Mr. Langley. She makes it downright pleasant as an exercise in more grease-paint to have all the old tricks exhumed once more—tricks, by the way, which from the screams of delighted terror that came from last night's audience prove they have not lost their usefulness.

When all the blood-and-thunder gangster-on of a South African folk play are suddenly interrupted by the city vanguard's insistence upon taking a bath in the Gerarts' humble dwelling, where there is no tub except in the kitchen, almost any one must begin to realize that Mr. Langley's drama is not to be taken too seriously, as a folk play. He plainly puts his cards on the table at this point, and pretty greasy cards they turn out to be. By this time his melodrama begins to be some thing of a spoof of itself.

### Miss Barrymore's Evening

Although Miss Barrymore plays it with genuine humor, she does not laugh at "Farm of Three Echoes." She pretends to take it with the most disarming seriousness. She seems to believe so completely in what she is saying and the spooks she is mentioning that it becomes difficult not to share her convictions. She does not achieve her results (and truly enjoyable results they are) by resorting to the easy props—the cane, the creaky voice, the lace cap, and the "Doodler's" makeup—she used for "Whiteoaks." It is her burning intensity, coupled with her lovely voice, her eloquent posture, and her manifest delight in the child's play she is trying to make adult, that lend interest to the play.

Arthur Hopkins has been no less wise in his direction. He not only insures "Farm of Three Echoes" its slaptrap values in suspense but treats it with such much reverence as if it were a diamond he had unearthed at Kimberley. Several of his actors waste themselves upon Mr. Langley's trash with the same frame of mind and seriousness and often with the same effectiveness. Dean Jagger is admirable as the last of the male Gerarts, Ann Dere is contributive as his ill-used mother, Priscilla Newton is charming as the young peasant threatened to send away. And McKay Morris, bearded like four Old Sals, plays the wicked elder Gerart with tremendous relish in the one act in which he appears before death claims him. But the evening is Miss Barrymore's. It is she who not only makes it enjoyable whenever she is around but who turns it into an exercise in acting well worth your while, regardless of what you may think of the play.



# "Farm of Three Echoes"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, November 29, 1939

## Ethel Barrymore in 'Farm of Three Echoes' With Dean Jagger and McKay Morris

By BROOKS ATKINSON

AFTER getting a taste of old age in "Whiteoaks" two seasons ago, Ethel Barrymore is putting her back into it in "Farm of Three Echoes," which was put on at the Cort last evening. With the connivance of the author, Noel Langley, she has put her age up to 97 and, to take her word for it, naps contentedly in her coffin upstairs in the afternoons. Strictly speaking, it may not be much of a part, but Miss Barrymore makes it hilarious. Under the mumbbling gabble of a bothersome old crone, the Barrymore gleam and mischief are vastly enjoyable. For Miss Barrymore knows how to speak a prosy line so that it is well salted with character; she knows how to shuffle up and down stairs like a supernaturated banshee. It is character-acting intended for enjoyment. Probably it pleases her. Certainly it delights the audience.

plays moldering in the garret, and that he needs to take a grip on himself.

As a vehicle for an actress on a holiday Mr. Langley's play is serviceable. About four years ago it was done in London with Dame May Whitty in the chief part, probably in an irreverent mood also. It has to do with a South African farming family in which the men folk carry on an evil tradition. Just how it comes about that the old crone's grandson gets so mixed up about sex that he keeps pushing his wife out of the way, your correspondent is unable to explain in detail. But the result is that doors open mysteriously, the wind howls around the edge of the house, a trooping undulates sinfully across the living room and the grandson rushes frantically all over the county. It is to be feared that Mr. Langley has been reading too many old

When grandmother is napping in her coffin upstairs, "Farm of Three Echoes" gets out of hand. Dean Jagger is in it, hemmed in by women. McKay Morris wears whiskers in it for one irate act, and Priscilla Newton and Nancy Sheridan tempt Mr. Jagger legally and iniquitously by turns. But sooner or later the old vixen, who saw Oom Paul in her youth, comes down to sit by the fire, bobbing and smiling over some secret satisfaction. The thoughts go scattering through her ancient mind, and scornful words pop out of her mouth. If Miss Barrymore were serious about it, the part would be silly. But she is humorous about it. She plays it with relish. As character acting it is more original than the old harridan of "Whiteoaks," and that was robust enough for an evening's amusement. Under the wigs and shawls it is Barrymore acting. The eyes are gay and mischievous.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, November 29, 1939

## Miss Barrymore

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THE only real trouble with "Farm of Three Echoes" is that it sometimes permits Miss Ethel Barrymore to get off the stage. It happens to be, after a rather interesting first act, a pretty feeble play, but that really doesn't matter a great deal when Miss Barrymore is around. Playing a mere ingenue of ninety-seven, after the 101-year-old lady she acted so valiantly in "Whiteoaks," she performs with such delightful humor and beautiful relish, with such a gift for the sheer magic of the theater, that she transforms the curious material of this drama about ghosts on the Veldt into something that is actually arresting. As in the case of "Whiteoaks," she makes "Farm of Three Echoes" a fine one-woman show, if not a distinguished drama. The great difficulty is that the exigencies of the plot demand that the eminent lady keep out of things for a great part of the second act, whereupon the drama appears as the inept work that it really is. You must give it credit, though, for providing Miss Barrymore with a role that permits her to be at her splendid best.

Without Miss Barrymore, "Farm of Three Echoes" would be a solemn drama about heavy doings among the Boers of the Orange Free State. It deals with husbands who horse-whip their wives, wives who cheerfully kill their husbands, old ladies who sleep in coffins, sons terrified of falling into the evil habits of their fathers, and presumably seductive women from the city who boldly toss themselves at the husky young males of the Veldt, and it regards all of them with due earnestness. Fortunately, Miss Barrymore, as the half-senile matriarch of the fable, brings so much raffish humor to her role that the narrative takes on a saving quality of macabre hilarity. Ghosts, wisely taken for granted and not impersonated by actors, dart about from time to time, but Miss Barrymore heckles them with gaiety and gusto. When she announces cheerily that Satan is on his way you have no doubt of it, any more than you doubt that she will greet him with high

glies and rout him soundly. It is a completely winning characterization that she offers, keeping you in the theater almost against your will and interesting you in what is a very shoddy play, for all its ambitious exploration of what is new ground for the local drama.

The atmosphere of "Farm of Three Echoes" is no doubt authentic, and we should be grateful to the theater when it opens up fresh territories to us. It does seem, though, that after a play has provided us with both new soil and a lively characterization it should go on and give us something in the way of genuine drama, rather than foolish episodes about city girls attempting to seduce innocent country boys. Therefore it is difficult to be thankful to the author of the new play, even if he has given us Miss Barrymore again at the peak of her grandeur. The sight of a Duma guarding her coffin with a shotgun or challenging the devil to come in and do battle with her in person is unenjoyable enough for us to hope for something good in the way of dramatic storytelling. Although Dean Jagger continues to make a good impression as the young man of the Veldt and Miss Priscilla Newton is an excellent ingenue, "Farm of Three Echoes" has only Miss Barrymore to give it life and excitement, and what a job she does!

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# "Key Largo"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, November 28, 1939

## "Key Largo" Brings Paul Muni Back to Stage After 7 Years

"Key Largo," drama by Maxwell Anderson. Produced by the Playwrights' Company at the Ethel Barrymore theatre Nov. 27, 1939.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

MAXWELL ANDERSON has reverted to the mood, and something of the manner, of his "Winterset" in the writing of the tragic drama that is "Key Largo," opening, with Paul Muni, at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre last night. Again he is writing of a tortured soul seeking answers to questions that life spells and every man answers according to his lights and his adventuring. "It is one's decent self one can't escape," wrote Galsworthy in the drama "Escape." It is from his decent self that the hero of "Key Largo" tries to escape for the length of an eloquent prologue in Spain and two acts at the tip end of nowhere down the Florida keys.

"Key Largo" is not as good drama as "Winterset." But in the writing, it is good. Anderson. There is that beauty of diction and that distinction of style in the dialogue, sweetened with the gentlest of poetic prose, that no other of our dramatists is able to command.

There is, too, a holding suspense in the story that is effective, a kind of spell cast by symbols rather than by characters.

There is some feeling for a mountain top in Spain, where five young American volunteers fighting for the Loyalists and the cause of freedom have holed in. But there is not much feeling for the Florida key. This, it seemed to me, offered a pretty false atmosphere of artificial theatre hurtful to the drama.

### Florida Victims

The people here, at least the principals among them, a Spaniard named D'Alcala and his daughter, Alegre, seemed terribly conscious of being citizens of an Anderson drama rather than of a Florida key. And when the villainous gambler and his stooges, and a small flock of phoney tourists moved in, they, too, seemed to come from dressing rooms and not from the world outside.

The D'Alcalas were the father and sister of Victor D'Alcala who had been King McCloud's pal when they had enlisted with the Loyalists to fight for liberty and the ideals that liberty breeds. But in Spain King had decided that the Loyalist's cause was lost, that liberty had been betrayed and that to fight longer was to die without purpose.

Victor and the others could not follow that argument. They had enlisted in defense of an ideal. The least they could do was to die for it. So they stayed and died and King McCloud came home.

### Tortured

He came home to face a tortured conscience. For months he went tramping over the country, seeking to give solace to the parents of the boys he had deserted. The D'Alcalas are the last of his calls. And to them he pours out again his story and his hunger for peace of mind.

It happens that he finds them in the grip of crooks. There is no law south of Miami, evidently, and the D'Alcalas are victims. There is a murder by gamblers who buy their way out of jail. There is danger for Victor's sister, whom King McCloud loves, and for her blind father. King takes on that danger and is shriven.

The performances are solemn and eloquent, as the Guthrie McClintic direction evidently intended they should be. They could, I think, be lightened a bit and seem more human.

The Muni performance is sensitive and fine, eloquent with understanding and forceful in its restraint. If he is not the best native character actor it is difficult at the moment to think of one who is. But even a Muni can be handicapped by the static drama.

Uta Hagen plays the D'Alcala daughter, also eloquently, but with some difficulty in making her words clear. Harold Johnsrud was excellent as D'Alcala, Frederic Tozere ruthless as the menacing villain and Ralph Theodore dramatically effective as the unprincipled sheriff. Nice Mielziner setting.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, November 28, 1939

## Key Largo Brings Muni Back to Stage

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

DURING a greater part of the unfolding of Maxwell Anderson's new drama, "Key Largo," last night at the Ethel Barrymore Theater, a great fear closed in upon me that his thesis was a cynical declaration that he who fights and runs away will live to fight another day. There were so many powerful arguments on the side of the man who refuses to die for a lost cause. So much was said for the right to live. There was so much justification for the relinquishment of ideals in the face of death. The logic of caution and cowardice and the case for opportunism as against principle were so forcefully stated.

Yet even I should have realized that all this was in the cause of dramatic effectiveness, and that in the end Maxwell Anderson would shatter the entire falsity to bits with one magnificent gesture, which is exactly what happens in the finest and most passionately sincere work he has accomplished in recent years.

"Key Largo" is the first production of the Playwrights' Company of the 1939-1940 season. In addition to restoring Anderson to the theater in a mood that towers far above "The Star Wagon" and that makes Knickerbocker Holiday, in retrospect, seem like a week-end frolic, it brings back to Broadway, after an absence of seven lean years, (lean for us, though not for him) assuredly one of the finest actors of our day, Paul Muni.

Here is a real part for Muni, not a part already fashioned by history and tailored to Hollywood tastes, but a role demanding every ounce of Muni's creative ability. He meets its exactions magnificently, and the cheers that arose at the conclusion of his performance

were not those of a clique nor of a cinemadict but of a genuinely appreciative audience.

The theme of the new play is established in a prologue which finds six young men holding an impossible mountain-top salient in Spain against the irresistible sweep of Franco's forces. King McCloud (Mr. Muni) has discovered the hopelessness of the cause, the impending surrender of the Madrid government, and the purpose of the general staff to desert these young men to their death. He counsels escape while escape is possible. His five companions resist all his arguments, loyal as they are, and elect to stay and die. The curtain falls as McCloud makes his way, alone, out of the trap.

Back in America, during the two succeeding acts, McCloud discovers that he has not, after all, escaped. There is no escape from his own soul. He can never escape, argue though he will in self-justification that his friends' sacrifice was in vain, that they are dead and he is alive, from the tormenting knowledge that he has betrayed his ideals.

Thus tortured, he arrives at Key Largo, in an inarticulate attempt to purge himself through confession to the father and sister of one of the young men he deserted. Here, once more, he meets, in personal and cruel application of the theme, the identical problem of death for an ideal or life through temporizing. A horde of gamblers, he finds, led by a murderous gangster, has fastened itself upon the family of his dead companion. For a time he tries to repeat his arguments on the side of surrender. In the end, regaining his spirituality through the regenerating influence of the girl and her father, he gives his own life to save them.

Mr. Anderson's philosophy, a demonstration at times of applied metaphysics, pours beautifully and rapidly from the lips of his characters. There is nothing lush nor magniloquent in their speeches, but there is much poetic imagery in them. And in his conclusions, every idea is driven home with thunderous impact, and it becomes an exalted expression of imperishable belief that the spiritual qualities of the human race must inevitably be victorious.

Flaws can be found in some parts of the play, no doubt. I am not a stickler for realism, but I think a question might be raised over King McCloud's appearance months after the episode in Spain, with all his clothes and accoutrements intact and arranged exactly as we saw him in the beginning. But little things like that are easily and quickly forgotten because they are overwhelmed by the theme.

Mr. Muni, as I said, carries on magnificently, and his representation of the tortured soul is a masterpiece of acting. Miss Uta Hagen fulfills the promise of these last few years, and appears to have arrived at acting maturity. Her role is the least sharply defined in Mr. Anderson's writings, and Miss Hagen at times seems to rise above it to become actually bigger than the part.

All the others in the large cast, and particularly Jose Ferrer and Frederic Tozere, round out the good performance, and this result is no doubt in part due to Mr. Guthrie McClintic's able direction. Jo Mielziner's realistic settings also help.



# "Key Largo"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, November 28, 1939

## Paul Muni Appears in Maxwell Anderson's Play

"Key Largo" Staged by the Playwrights' Company at the  
Ethel Barrymore

By JOHN MASON BROWN

NO DRAMATIST writing for the contemporary theatre can claim a nobler vision of the timeless function of high tragedy than Maxwell Anderson. That slender volume, known as "The Essence of Tragedy," in which he has collected his prefaces and addresses, is eloquent proof of this.

In theory he understands, as few men do, the spiritual elevation of the tragic. His pessimism, his disillusionment, his insistence that the rats shall inherit the earth and that men build only to build ruins have not blinded him to the exaltation of high tragedy's ideal. He has himself confessed that, as he sees it, the reassuring

hope offered to mankind by the authors of a tragedy is that men are better than they think they are—better than their clay, in fact—and that they can rise superior to physical defeat and death. He has recognized, too, the importance of language. During many years of worthy effort, if uncertain achievement, he has sought to restore the poet to his proper place in the theatre; to take playgoers off a "starvation diet of prose"; and to give the wings of great words to great emotions.

But between Mr. Anderson, the theorist, and Mr. Anderson, the doer, there has often been a disconcerting difference. The two have not always been on speaking terms. Although they bowed to one another at times during "Key Largo" last night, they by no means established what can be described as a happy intimacy.

### All Or Nothing

Obviously Mr. Anderson's new play at the

Ethel Barrymore is the work of a dramatist whose aims are high. Obviously it is the product of a proud spirit, and of a man who can think his own thoughts on issues which must everywhere be faced today. Obviously, too, as it tells its story of a man who died spiritually by avoiding death with the loyalist forces in Spain only to come to life again when he is prepared to die a sacrificial death in some gambler's scrape in Florida, it shows that Mr. Anderson's understanding of the tragic ideal is as exalted as it ever was. No less obviously his new drama erupts at moments into speeches worthy of his best poetic efforts.

Even so, when its Spanish prologue is over, and its first passionate conflict of credos is past, "Key Largo" soon fails to live up both to Mr. Anderson's aspirations as a preface-writer and its own potentialities.

It comes across as an honorable intention rather than a good play. If it has its inter-

mittent moments of interest, it never rises to excitement. It is all ripples and no waves, and frequently its ripples are far apart.

It is bogged down by talk. It is chilled by pretentiousness. It is marred by Mr. Anderson's refusal to use a blue pencil. Its poetic tirades prove plumes on some elaborate harness put upon a stationary horse. Its action and its philosophy are not happily mixed. It is deadened by Mr. Anderson's unfortunate habit of breaking his poetic speeches into long choral odes. It is kept unnecessarily formal by his seeming unwillingness to shorten his dialogue for dramatic purposes. Its writing seems hurried. Fine as are occasional speeches, one is never allowed to forget they are speeches and consider them both contributive parts of a whole. Then, too, the melodramatic goings-on of the Florida acts appear to have as little reason as they have suspense.

### Mr. Muni Excellent

The truth is that in "Key Largo" Mr. Anderson is saying a very simple thing. He is insisting that to live men must be ready to die for their ideals. He is pointing out that the mere act of having life does not mean being alive. He is indicating that man who may no longer believe in God must endure himself and life, take on some of the attributes of the Godhead themselves. And he is establishing, obliquely, that, to his thinking, his Florida gambler and Frazer them both of their destructive forces of the same kind; gangsters differing only in degree; challenges that must be dealt with in the same way. Yet simple and decidedly worthwhile as are Mr. Anderson's points, he does not make them simply or dramatize them with the interest they deserve.

It is excellent to have Paul Muni back on the New York stage. He is an enormously gifted and exceptional actor, and he gives an admirable performance as Mr. Anderson's regenerated hero. He sets about his work with the most comforting kind of surety. More than that he executes it with a modesty matched only by his brilliance. His is a memorable characterization of a part which clings hardly be called tempting.

Uta Hagen as the girl in Florida, Harold Johnsrud as her blind father, Jose Ferrer as her brother who died in Spain, Ralph Theodore as a bullying sheriff, and Frederic Tozere as the villainous gambler all contribute to the Playwrights' Company's first production of the winter. But the evening comes as more of an honorable failure than as a success. It leaves one admiring Mr. Anderson and his high intentions but disappointed in his result.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, November 28, 1939

## The Man Who Fled

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IN "KEY LARGO" Maxwell Anderson continues his cosmic broodings amid the mountains of Spain and the keys of Florida. Once more he is thinking lofty thoughts about life and death and loyalty and sacrifice and the relations between man and a God he has ceased to believe in. Again he contemplates almost mystically the fate and future of humanity and its ideals, and indulges in a bit of lyric pessimism. This time, with Paul Muni playing brilliantly as a sort of modern-clothes Hamlet, his play is eloquent, heartfelt, often stirring and almost always strangely unsatisfying. There are times when the Anderson blank verse grows slightly turgid.

but, on the whole, the play is genuinely successful so far as the problem of fitting subject to literary style goes. My objection to "Key Largo" is based on a conviction that the author tends to obscure the motives of his important characters and to make them more eloquent than incisive in the expression of their ideas.

The protagonist of "Key Largo" is one King McCloud, who has gone to Spain to fight for the loyalists. As defeat looms for his cause and the section he leads is in a hopeless position, he deserts, leaving his men to die behind him. To save his own life he even joins the advancing Fascists and fights against the remnants of the fleeing government forces. His belief is that he has left his companions because of disillusionment over the cause for which he was fighting and through his conviction that it was wasteful to give one's life

unnecessarily. Always, though, he is filled with the vague but terrible possibility that something between cowardice and a despairing cynicism has made him its helpless victim. He goes to Florida, to the home of the most idealistic of his dead companions, to confess and find compassion, but when he would save the boy's sister and blind father from a gangster, his fatal weakness overcomes him again. In the end, being a Maxwell Anderson character in a Maxwell Anderson tragedy, he gives his life to destroy the gangster and perishes poetically.

It is, I think, a good scenario for the expression of Mr. Anderson's strange sort of exalted defeatism, and it offers that combination of melodrama with lyric tragedy which is the heart and soul of his muse. I cannot help thinking, though, that his verse

trips him up to the extent of making his monologues vague and obscure. It is not altogether the spectator's fault if he never quite knows what it was that drove King McCloud to desert. His first failure against the villainous Florida racketeer is clear, for it is the author's point that once a man has argued himself into the belief that there is nothing one should die for it is impossible for him to reverse his field quickly and fight for something. My chief complaint is against the final heroic death of McCloud, the loyalist Hamlet. Unless it is that he goes to his willing destruction out of a sort of loveless romanticism, brought on by the discovery that the sister of his dead companion loves him, there is no proper clarification of his motive, and I don't think that this sort of romanticism satisfies Mr. Anderson.

It was, the records show, seven years ago that Mr. Muni left us for Hollywood, and so long a stay among the California fleshpots has been harmful to the talents of more than one good actor. Yet Mr. Muni returns as fine a player as ever and, I suspect, even a little more distinguished in his work. He is a moving and eloquent performance, forceful, sturdy, sensitive, human and understanding. There can be no doubt that Mr. Muni is a splendid actor, and I trust that he will remain in the theater for a long time to come. For the next best portrayal I would turn to the work of the reliable Ralph Theodore as a crooked sheriff, although Harold Johnsrud and Miss Uta Hagen are, on the whole, effective as father and sister of the dead loyalist. I found the usually excellent Jose Ferrer a trifle too rapt as the valiant member of the International Brigade in the play's admirable prologue. Frederic Tozere is a good villain as the racketeer. "Key Largo" is unquestionably a play with distinction, but I cannot help thinking that it is also muddy and inconclusive.

# "The World We Make"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, November 21, 1939

## "The World We Make" Drama Of a Lady Who Lost Her Mind

"The World We Make," drama by Sidney Kingsley. Presented by the Author at the Guild Theatre, New York, Nov. 20, 1939.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THERE is a good bit of fancy dramatic trimming tacked on to the story of "The World We Make," which Sidney Kingsley presented at the Guild theatre last night. But the story that comes through it is rather simple and quite human.

The heroine has worked herself into a state of mind because of the cruelty and misunderstanding of her parents and the death of her brother.

She has been placed in a sanitarium, treated and pronounced cured. She escapes from the sanitarium, takes a job in a laundry and goes to the tenement room of a sympathetic laundry worker.

Reconditioned by this robanic adventure she lapses into her old fears, refuses to marry the boy and is on the verge of a second collapse when his sudden need of her restores her confidence in herself, and delivers her from her morbid state.

### From a Book

How faithfully this stage arrangement follows and extracts the meat from the novel by Millen Brand, called "The Outward Room," from which Mr. Kingsley took it, I do not know. There is evidence that it misses something of what might have been the psycho-analytical significance of the original, and that the characters are but sketchy outlines of those more completely drawn in the book.

But it provides holding entertainment in the Kingsley version, is effectively staged in three original and realistic settings by Harry Horner, is well acted and was enthusiastically applauded by last night's welcoming audience.

Here we have Mr. Kingsley, who is definitely a realist of the theatre, submitting to the clinical urge that prompted him to write "Men in White," crossed by a love of realism that begot "Dead End."

### Tenement Troubles

His people are again the poor in purse, the simple in mind, the pure in heart. He still spits through his teeth occasionally, as a defiant confession of his proletarian tastes. His

humor is paradoxically sometimes caught on the fly because its aim is low.

But he has deep feeling for struggling, suffering humans. He would see them through a muddled world and set their feet on broadening paths of peace with justice.

His hero in "The World We Make" is an honest high school fellow who would give his bed to any tired waif adrift in the city, while he spreads a blanket on the floor and reads himself to sleep with "Old Curiosity Shop."

In such minor instances he is false to the realism he so painstakingly develops in such scenes as that of a wet-wash laundry in full operation.

The laundry item is as stirring and as convincing in both machinery and personnel as was the dead end wharf and its grimy kids in the play "Dead End."

### Minor Slips

But his first tenement scene with the introduction of the distraught heroine to the home life of her knight of the steam tubs is true to nothing but the theatre at its cheapest.

The heroine is played by Margo, and with effective intensity. Life is not exactly the personality that suggests the type of girl I assume this heroine was supposed to be, the delicately reared daughter of those who live by the standards of the higher social brackets, but she gives a moving performance trying to be. A carefully acquired pantomime is of help to her characterization.

Herbert Rudley is noble and not too stagey as the rescuing knight. Rudolph Forster is nicely in character as a specialist of mental disorders, and there are a variety of foreign character bits by Tito Vuolo, Kasia Oraszewski, Thelma Schnee and others.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, November 21, 1939

## Sidney Kingsley's 'The World We Make' Is Stage Version of 'The Outward Room'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ALTHOUGH Millen Brand's novel, "The Outward Room," may not seem like an ideal stage material, Sidney Kingsley has made a deeply moving play out of it. "The World We Make" he calls it. As adaptor, director and producer, he put it on at the Guild Theatre last evening. Mr. Brand's novel told the haunting story of a mentally unbalanced girl who escaped from an institution and healed herself by living a normal life with normal people. For the childish purpose of dazzling the audience with some of Harry Horner's most astonishing scenery, Mr. Kingsley has plunged one scene into the steamy clatter of a laundry, and he takes pains to squeeze all the current significance he can out of a story that is rooted in individual anguish.

But the theme can stand it, since it is soundly motivated, and Mr. Kingsley has not lost the compassion of a fine study of character fulfillment. In the chief part, Margo gives her best performance, beautifully tracing the development of character out of frightened loneliness to the freedom of the mature social world. Although Mr. Kingsley's "Dead End" made a broader show, "The World We Make" is an infinitely more sensitive glance into the shadowy mind of a human being. It is brave, original and fervent in conviction, and an ornament to our theatre.

In the prologue Virginia is confined to a sanitarium for mental cases. Strangely ob-

essed by the violent death of her brother, she is ridden with nameless terrors and cannot face the jangle of the world. But she escapes, ventures into a steam laundry in search of a job, takes refuge with a decent young man who works there, goes helplessly to live in his tenement room and falls in love with him. After the realistic sensationalism of the steam laundry scene, "The World We Make" settles down into a gusty chronicle of Virginia's warm and affectionate life with the tenement dwellers in a frowsy building, the pungent normality of the real world gradually triumphing over her terror until she perceives that one corner of the world needs her as much as she needs it. The victory is so simple that it is

profoundly stirring—the miracle of nature no longer resisted.

Since the scene in the steam laundry is brilliantly described in Mr. Horner's setting, let Mr. Kingsley and him take full credit for a latter-day Belascoism. As a matter of fact Mr. Horner's scenery is brilliantly imagined throughout, suggesting in ominous shadows the imprisonment within the sanitarium and by open construction the friendliness of the tenement rookery. But that finishes the showmanship of "The World We Make." For Mr. Kingsley's realistic writing for the character bits in the tenement, his portrait of life swirling helter-skelter through this battered room and the dark hall outside it are his relict description of the affection Virginia has for the man she has discovered and taken into her heart make "The World We Make" a cheerful, merry and also poignant drama of a part of life that is usually sacrificed to political causes in modern writing. Although Mr. Kingsley talks a little too much in his last scene, most of his writing admirably understates the meaning and some of it he has the courage to leave to pantomime.

As Virginia, Margo is superb. It is a performance of shy, trembling sincerity that expresses through acting the human truths Virginia has in words to describe. Herbert Rudley is excellent in the part of the laundry hero, Thelma Schnee catches the glow of character in the part of one of the neighbors. As a good-natured Italian from upstairs, Tito Vuolo is infectious in his amusing. There is a good characterization of a mental physician by Rudolph Forster. And the long cast includes a number of lively character bits in the scenes of neighborhood life. Like a showman, Mr. Kingsley is lavish with local color. But like a dramatist he can appreciate the fragility and valor of a human being. The theatre should be proud of the world he, Margo and Millen Brand have made out of awareness and integrity.

# "The World We Make"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, November 21, 1939

## "The World We Make," with Margo, Opens at the Guild Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

MILLEN BRAND'S "The Outward Room" was not a particularly long novel, but it was a tightly packed one, impressive and full of substance. It was also a novel in which the physical action and the words actually spoken were subordinated to the disturbed, terrified life which went on in one woman's mind. Novels of this sort do not lend themselves readily to dramatization, but Sidney Kingsley has managed to get a good deal of this one on the stage in "The World We Make," which opened at the Guild Theater last evening.

He has found it convenient, to be sure, to leave a good deal of Mr. Brand's work unutilized, and perhaps what he has discarded is what was most significant. His play is affecting, and sad and hopeful, and bigger words than any of these except the last would be necessary to describe Mr. Brand's story of a mentally ill girl who found health when she went out into the world and took part in it. But within its limits, "The World We Make" is perceptive and sincere. It is also technically expert and, at the Guild, acted with honest feeling.

The play tells the novel's simple story, and simplifies it still further. The girl of the story has grown up in an atmosphere of domestic strife, clinging to her brother's love. The brother is killed and her mind goes out of control, unable to surmount what I believe is called a "block." She is sent to a sanitarium and escapes from it, possibly through the conviction of the sympathetic psychiatrist in charge. penniless, she goes into the world.

She finds a job for a day, and then finds love and slowly finds healing through it, and through being needed. This is in the book, pretty much as Mr. Kingsley tells it, although he has brought the war in and given it sig-

nificance to the story. But he has ignored what Mr. Brand clearly felt was salient to the cure—the fact that the girl found a place in the world of work, and saved herself through tasks and routine and a sense of belonging with others. Mr. Kingsley has decided that love is enough, and I am not sure that this is very convincing psychologically or, what is more important, as effective as it might be dramatically.

But Mr. Kingsley has retained the sincerity and humanness of the story. He has taken the subsidiary characters—the Italian with his dog, the Polish couple and their eager daughter, the alarmed young bridegroom, the squirming children—and, as he lifted them from the book to the stage, given them three dimensions and abundant life. And he has found the people to play his parts. Margo, admirably cast, gives a completely touching and real performance as the girl; Herbert Rudley gives strength to the part of her healing lover, Rudolph Forster; Joseph Pevney, Tito Vuolo, Kasia Oraszewski, Harold J. Stone, Thelma

### "THE WORLD WE MAKE"

A play in three acts by Sidney Kingsley, based on Milken Brand's novel "The Outward Room"; settings by Harry Horner; directed and presented at the Guild Theater on November 20, 1939, by Mr. Kingsley. The cast:  
Dr. Schiller.....Rudolph Forster  
Head nurse.....Louise Huntington  
Nurse Regia.....Dagmar  
Virginia McKay.....Margo  
Bonnie Roberts.....Zola Talma  
Mrs. McKay.....Carroll Ashburn  
First laundry truckman.....Frank Richards  
Second laundry truckman.....Erwin Edwards

Third laundry truckman.....Jerome Thor  
Modesto.....Nick Dennis  
Morris, the marker.....Solen Burry  
Cora.....Daga Hammond  
Jim Kohler.....Joseph Pevney  
John Kohler.....Herbert Rudley  
Louis, the foreman.....Harold Gary  
Boss.....Albert Vees  
Ruth.....Ruth Sherrill  
Rosebud.....Billie Haywood  
Pearl.....Katherine Murphy  
Rocco.....Tito Vuolo  
Mary.....Louise Huntington  
Mrs. Zubriaki.....Kasia Oraszewski  
Mr. Zubriaki.....Harold Stone  
Anna.....Thelma Schneé  
Neighbor.....Louise Huntington  
Renting agent.....Lee Harrett  
Sally.....Eve March  
Danny.....Buddy Swan  
Janet.....Eric Roberts  
Al.....James O'Beary  
Neighbor.....Randolph Preston  
Laundry workers: Florence Redd, Eloise Boudin, Mildred Truppe, Dagmar Hamph.

Schnee and the others in the large cast animate the play.

Harry Horner has invented several fine sets. The one in a laundry is excitingly informative and drips with steam, and the others are ingenious without being obtrusive. Mr. Kingsley has filled the sets with life and feeling. It is probable, however, that "The World We Make" will be more fully satisfying to those who have not read "The Outward Room" than to those who have.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, November 21, 1939

## The World We Make, a Play of Realism

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

IF, AS we are inclined to believe, it is Sidney Kingsley's desperate mission in life to present the squalid circumstances of slum life with as much cruel realism as can be encompassed in three acts of any one play, then I think he succeeds admirably in his new work, *The World We Make*, which had its premiere last night at the Guild Theater under his own auspices.

But even a vicarious existence, first in a psychopathic hospital, then in the steam and slime of a laundry, and finally in a cold water flat that seems to have been overlooked by the Sanitation Department, is apt to be both distressing and depressing. Such a play is not for the fastidious pleasure seeker.

That alone, I realize, should not condemn a play. All this sad or revolting realism, if it persuaded our more favored citizens to give hearts are more than coronets and that rags are royal raiment, etc., etc., for all I can say to the contrary.

At any rate Mr. Kingsley opens his play with a prologue in the Greendale Sanitarium, where a kindly Dr. Schiller is attempting to restore to mental health a young woman of wealth whose delicate nervous system has been shattered by family hatreds. The young woman runs away, obtains work in a laundry, is overwhelmed by the kindness of a fellow worker amid the noisome vapors of the steam room, and becomes his mistress. With him she lives for nearly a year in the old law flat here-inafore mentioned, and is in the end brought back to complete sanity by witnessing her lover's futile grief over the death of his own brother.

Mr. Kingsley's stagecraft is excellent, and it is apparent throughout the eight scenes of *The World We Make*. But he seems destined to go poking around in the gutters of life for his themes. This one he found in Milken Brand's novel, *The Outward Room*, which (on hearsay evidence as far as this reviewer is concerned) was well and favorably received a few years

I cannot say whether this is psychologically sound, but it seemed to me that a great deal of Virginia McKay's hysteria (in its medical, not its popular, sense) was little more than downright selfishness—a desire to revel in her own grief. Part of that feeling may have been due to the puzzling handling of the role by Margo, and part of it may be due to the writing, but in either event I have less sympathy than I should for either one—the character or the actress.

In the main the play moves swiftly. It boils over with authentic characters, almost as untamed as those Mr. Kingsley found on the pier in *Dead End*. It has, in addition to the terrific tenement scene, an interior view of a laundry that is so powerful that henceforth some worthy Chinese is going to do all the work on my other shirt. And neither Mr. Kingsley nor Harry Horner, who designed the sets, let anything stand in the way of transporting any horrible reality that occurred to them to the Guild Theater stage. The steam hisses, the mangles rotate, the dirty clothes tumble into hoppers, all under perfect management.

Of the large cast (it takes a lot of people to run a laundry) I most appreciated the sure and sane acting methods of Rudolph Forster, who was well cast in the role of a Viennese refugee psychiatrist. Herbert Rudley was inclined to overdo the dumb manliness of the noble laundry worker who took the girl under his wing, and there were moments when he and Margo, in accomplishing their light house-keeping, became too coy and precious. On the other hand, for Thelma Schneé, who was one of the brightest starlets in the summer skies this year, I have only the best of words. She has the power to make you believe in the character she plays, which in this instance is that of a second generation Polish girl, and I think that is because she believes in the character herself.

Despite all its realism, Mr. Kingsley's play leaves me strangely unmoved, and I can find no possible grounds for putting it on the preferred list, either as entertainment or as propaganda.



# "The World We Make"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, Nov. 21, 1939

## Sidney Kingsley Stages

### "The World We Make"

Margo Seen in His Dramatization of "The Outward Room" at the Guild

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IF DAVID BELASCO'S spirit wandered into the Guild last night, it doubtless had a very good evening; a better time, in fact, than some of us were having who button our collars in front and have never felt quite comfortable in the presence of the kind of infinitely flicky but empty realism which was so dear to the heart of that departed maestro Mr. Woolcott once dubbed "The Wizard of '88."

For Sidney Kingsley is a realist who belongs to the house of David. He is, in many ways, the last of the Belasco naturalists. He is almost as much a gadgeteer as he is a playwright. One suspects that if he could choose between an original and a

reproduction Mr. Kingsley's worship of duplications would always force him to select the reproduction. He loves replicas, or rather near-replicas, almost as dearly as Rube Goldberg dotes upon inventions. The operating room in "Men in White," the waterfront in "Dead End," and the Krupp factory scene in "Twenty Million Ghosts" have all, with varying success, made his photographic interests clear.

It was not surprising, therefore, to find Mr. Kingsley indulging to the full last night his fondness for non-essentials when, in "The World We Make," he produced a play of his own writing based upon Millen Brand's novel, "The Outward Room."

Mr. Kingsley has discovered in Harry Horner, who serves him as designer, a capable partner in his conspiracy for detailed illusion. Between them, Mr. Horner and Mr. Kingsley create quite a few scenic marvels of that childish sort of which Mr. Belasco would have ap-

proved. They give you all the glistening white details of a consulting office in an insane asylum. They place a huge, grubby laundry in front of you which is so realistic that (as Arthur Hopkins would say) it is remarkable only because it is NOT real. They also present a cross-section of a tenement house apartment—hall, stairs, kitchen, neighbors, and all. But, though the dirty linen is dirty in their laundry, and the soup steams when it is taken off the stove in their kitchen, my fear is that their genuine contribution (no matter how skillful it may be in its painstaking way) ends just about here.

#### The Toys of Realism

That there is a certain passing nursery delight to be had in toys of this realistic kind, and that the toys in question are indisputably ingenious, is not to be denied. Yet when once

they have afforded their quick pleasures of recognition, they exhaust themselves for those who esthetically are unwilling to stay in the nursery. No doubt what Mr. Kingsley meant to do with his over-scrupulous naturalism was to find a theatrical equivalent for the psychological methods which, those who have read it tell me, lend interest to "The Outward Room" as a novel. The pity is that Mr. Kingsley's strategy fails because what he tends to do is to keep one always on the midway and away from the main exhibits.

His play, though long drawn out, is a very simple affair. Yet somehow its plot seems a needle lost, not in a haystack but in a photograph of a haystack. Although it ought to tell the poignant story of how a girl, whose mind has been unhinged by the cruelty of her rich parents, regains her sanity through a good poor man's love, Mr. Kingsley blurs his story's point in his far too elaborate telling.

His laundry scene, which in his narrative is merely an episode, is as elaborately done as if his whole drama were to be the tale of a tub. Mr. Kingsley's writing, too, though occasionally pointed in the war references he has added and sometimes moving in its own rights, suffers by the obviousness of its observation. As dramatist no less than as director Mr. Kingsley insists upon saying rather than suggesting. Indeed, his dialogue is so literal for the most part that one cannot but salute his one scene in "dumb show" as his major gift to the evening as a playwright.

#### Glorifying the Obvious

In spite of the sentimentalities of Mr. Kingsley's handling and his insistence upon making a clear point clearer and clearer, Margo acquires herself with distinction as the girl whose search is for sanity. Although she is monotone, her voice is lovely and she plays with imagination and a discreetly controlled pathos. But moving as she often is; and good as are Rudolph Forster and Herbert Rudley as the doctor and the lover; and colorful as are some of the super-realistic "bit" players, the truth is that Mr. Kingsley's "The World We Make" reaches more dead ends in its production and its story-telling than is good for it.

For my own part, and notwithstanding those who remained to cheer last night, I would rather have a sceneryless "Our Town" for a hundred consecutive nights than one evening of a work which offers so little in the theatre that is evocative either in its writing or its background.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, Nov. 21, 1939

## Escape Into Life

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

MR. KINGSLEY, who has dramatized Millen Brand's novel "The Outward Room," under the title of "The World We Make," has become the most meticulous of our realists. Since Norman Bel Geddes provided him with a city street for "Dead End" he has not been content with approximations on the stage, but must have the real thing, as if he were the David Belasco of the '30s, with the differences you would anticipate. He had a munitions factory for "Ten Million Ghosts," and now for "The World We Make," he has a fully equipped laundry, with shirts, socks and towels, and a tenement flat, with gas and running water. When his people make spaghetti they open cans of real tomato paste, and when they scrub the floors you have no doubt about the soap and the mops. All of this at least gives an air of surface verisimilitude to the proceedings of the plot, and the resulting narrative is earnest and heartfelt and honestly drab, but, I am afraid, just a trifle lacking in the lift of first-rate dramatic writing.

It would be giving you a false impression if I left you with the idea that Mr. Kingsley's realism extends only to the physical equipment of his plays. His laundries, tenements and hospitals are three-dimensional and convincing, but so are his neurotic young women, his comic Italians, his harassed Polish families, his upright liberal workmen and his earnest psychiatrists. Their parties, their amours, their talks about life and love and the state of the world are as believably and

completely presented as the radios they listen to, the fires they light, the beds they make and the water they turn on. The effect of all this is that the people of the drama do seem to live and breathe before you. If, then, I am not as content with the dramatic activities of "The World We Make" as I should be, it is because the Kingsley dialogue, in its determination to be realistic, seems to me lacking in the emotional power, the tragic intensity and the imaginative skill that would have made a believable story a properly moving one. It is, I am afraid, typical that the best scene in the play is one in which no word is spoken.

"The Outward Room" is one of those novels that I never did get around to reading, but I am told that Mr. Kingsley's dramatization is something more than literal. Anyway, the plot

of "The World We Make" deals with the case of a neurotic young woman on the verge of madness who flees from the sanatorium where she is taking treatment. Hating her family and believing that they drove her brother to his death, her emotions have dried up and she thinks herself incapable of real feeling. It is only when she meets a young laundry worker, goes to live with him and begins to interest herself in life and love and the pathetic strivings of simple people that she effects a cure. The great Viennese physician could not manage Mr. Kingsley's compassion for the weak and the disinherited of this earth is as earnest as Mr. Saroyan's, but it seems to me that a semi-poetic approach to such an attitude in the drama is more effective these days than the strictly realistic manner.

The play was also staged by Mr. Kingsley, and there can be no doubt of his excellence as a director. Not only are the realistic details of the narrative managed with admirable credibility, but the actors are handled with unusual skill. The young Mexican actress who is content to be known merely as Margo is particularly good as the distraught girl of the story, giving the best performance she has yet managed in the theatre. The lesser players are likewise excellent. Herbert Rudley is fine as the stalwart laundry worker who is chiefly responsible for the girl's cure, while Harold Stone and Miss Kasin Orszaszewski, as the sympathetic Polish neighbors; Tito Vuolo, as the friendly Italian upstairs—in Mr. Kingsley's play you feel sure that he does live upstairs—and, in particular, Miss Thelma Schene as the elder daughter of the Polish family are excellent in their roles. There is good work, too, by Joseph Payne as Miss Eve March as a hapless young couple. "The World We Make" is an excellent example of carefully detailed stage realism, with all its virtues and its defects.

# "Life With Father"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, November 9, 1939

## 'Life With Father,' Based on Clarence Day's Stories, Opens at the Empire

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THEY have taken the inimitable stories Clarence Day wrote about his father and braided them into a play which is called, of course, "Life With Father" and opened last evening at the Empire. And they have captured all the life which bubbled in the stories, and all the richness of character of the man who became simply "Father" to thousands, and all the comedy which was so tender and at the same time so vigorous. You would never have dreamed any one could do so beautiful a job of translation.

Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse turned the sketches into scenes and acts and Mr. Lindsay plays Father himself, that choleric household tyrant of the 1880's who was always laying down the law and being first and who was never quite a match for Mother. He is one of the abiding characters, I suspect, of American literature, and he has not lost an inch of bristle or a single intonation of comic rage in his translation to the stage. And if you have an image of Father you will find it safe in Mr. Lindsay's hands.

There is no describing Father in a paragraph or two for those so unfortunate as not to have met him. He is red-haired and highly colored and he explodes regularly, with despairing blasphemies which are more than half prayer. "Oh, God!" cries Father, beseeching guidance in a world filled with the gentle irrationality, and the loving guile, of Mother; filled, too, with relatives who come to visit, with bills, with Democrats, and with the awful determination of the New Haven Railroad to ruin him by having wrecks. It is filled with maids who hear Father and weep and vanish; with young sons who in-

sist on buying new suits, and with china pug dogs which appear suddenly on the dining table. He is heroic, in his rage, is Father, and hopelessly masculine in his inability to cope with his wife. She, as unpredictable as a bird and as gently determined as she needs to be, smiles and weeps and has her way.

"Life With Father" was a series of exploding episodes, and it is still a little that in the play. But Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse have found a thread to run through it. Mother wants Father to be baptized and Father struggles, and is sure he won't be kept out of heaven on a "technicality." But Mother, who could not live anywhere without Father and comes tumbling down the stairs pell-mell when she thinks he needs her, is taking no chances. Father thunders and changes the subject and feels that there is unfairness somewhere, but baptized he is in the end. By then Clarence has got his new suit, and his girl, too, and if Mother has lost her pug dog—it is changed for the suit in a transaction which makes Father tear his hair—she has

### 'LIFE WITH FATHER'

A play in three acts by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse; based on stories by Clarence Day; staged by Bretaigne Windust; setting and costumes by Stewart Chantry; presented at the Empire Theater on November 8, 1939, by Oscar Serlin. The cast:

|                         |                     |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Vinnie.....             | Dorothy Stickney    |
| Annie.....              | Katherine Bard      |
| Clarence.....           | John Drew Devereaux |
| John.....               | Richard Simon       |
| Whitney.....            | Raymond Roe         |
| Harlan.....             | Larry Robinson      |
| Father.....             | Howard Lindsay      |
| Margaret.....           | Dorothy Bernard     |
| Cora.....               | Ruth Hammond        |
| Mary.....               | Teresa Wright       |
| The Rev. Dr. Lloyd..... | Richard Sterling    |
| Della.....              | Fortis Morrow       |
| Nora.....               | Nellie Burt         |
| Dr. Humphreys.....      | A. H. Van Buren     |
| Dr. Sommers.....        | John C. King        |
| Maggie.....             | Timothy Keane       |

lost it, you can be sure, only for the moment. It is gay and funny and, I think by all odds the most engaging, happiest play in town. It is done in a set which is a museum piece of Americana, and the foibles of the past wander happily into it. And it is also, light and without laboring the point, part of the experience of any lucky wife and lucky husband.

Mr. Lindsay's portrait has, under the circumstances, something faintly miraculous about it. Every one who reads Mr. Day's stories invented Father for himself, and any actor in the part risks being considered an interloper. But Mr. Lindsay's Father is, by Father's standards, a happy coincidence, but more apt to be mighty fine acting, precisely the Father I had imagined and I suspect almost every one will find this true for himself. Mother was never so clear, so Mr. Dorothy Stickney has a fresh field, and her Vinnie is a delight. All the other parts are subsidiary to these, but John Drew Devereaux, Richard Simon, Raymond Roe and Larry Robinson are happy choices to play the red-headed Day boys and the other actors add genial life to an animated, completely captivating play.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, November 9, 1939

## Life With Father True to Essays

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

LIFE with Clarence Day's father, in all the late-Victorian magnificence of their Madison Ave. home, must have been a joyful, glorious and certainly continuously exciting adventure. It was made so, at least, in that remarkable series of essays in which the late Clarence Day introduced his sire to a world of readers just a few years ago. And now, dramatized with faithful adherence to the high spirit of the original stories, we have a stage play in which the senior Mr. Day will ride still further, in his loud and conquering fashion, into the hearts of all who see and hear him.

It is a delicate and sometimes dangerous operation to take the brilliant and beloved work of another man and attempt to bring it to three-dimensional life in the theater. My compliments today go to Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse who, far from distorting the gaily impudent picture of Father, have made it stand forth with clarity. As a reward for their integrity I believe they have—as they deserve—one of the season's smash hits.

That *Life With Father*, which was presented by Oscar Serlin at the Empire Theater last night, will be subjected to the complaint of some exacting technicians that it is lacking in plot I have no doubt. There is no more plot, in fact, than you will find in *The Time Of Your Life*. It is a family album, with Father's portraits predominating. Father in all his moods, Father declaiming his wrath against the corrupt city administration and frightening the new maid into falling down stairs; Father patiently and then in mighty exasperation attempting to teach Mother the

fundamentals of bookkeeping; Father in mellow humor over the goodness of the morning kippers and in a tantrum over the weakness of the morning coffee; Father in the continuous upsurge over the monthly bills and as continuously baffled and defeated by the delicious muddle-headedness (and strength of will and feminine wisdom) of his wife.

The threads that hold these portraits together are slender—so slender that they are scarcely noticable. Actually we are treated to the experiences of five weeks in the Day home, in the course of which Father, a strict individualist, if there ever was one in the matters of religion, is forced against his will to undergo the rite of baptism, which had somehow been neglected in his youth.

Not all his blustering and fuming, nor all his violent attempts to frustrate his good wife's will in regard to this baptism avail him any escape. He is doomed from the start.

The problems of young Clarence Day, Jr., about to enter the freshman class at Yale, centering around a personable young female visitor to the Day home, and the necessity of procuring a new suit, for the courting, provide a sort of secondary theme. Realizing Father's unbending character you can understand and sympathize with Clarence who finds that Father's old suit, cut down to this size, will not permit him to indulge in any weaknesses, such as permitting the young lady to sit in his lap. Father's dignity is so overpowering that it permeates the very clothing he wears like a sort of moral moth-proofing.

Father's hatred of visiting relatives and his futile attempts to shorten or block entirely these unwelcome descents upon his peace provide further hilarious interludes, and the succession of four "new" maids whom Father frightens into disappearing adds to the magnificent picture of household confusion.

Nor have the authors neglected Father's inner goodness. The pathetic bewilderment with which he meets his wife's illness, emphasized by his profane contempt for the whole medical profession, is profoundly touching and the proof of his sincerity and love is found in his frightened willingness even to undergo the torture of baptism— if his promise will restore her health.

The whole adventure, in short, is hilarious, but at many times deeply stirring. Certainly it has nostalgic quality that provides a fine undertone for this new conception of Father.

Mr. Serlin has given the comedy a fine cast headed by Mr. Lindsay who is made up to look like a John Held, Jr. engraving. Mr. Lindsay plays the part explosively and, I am happy to say, in keeping with the image most of us had conceived from Clarence Day's original stories. Dorothy Stickney gave an outstanding portrayal of Father's wife Vinnie, and John Drew Devereaux and Richard Simon were true to life, as Mr. Day's two eldest sons, Clarence and John.

I think you will love the entire Day family. Certainly you will not be frightened by Father's bluster. It's only his way.

# "Life With Father"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, November 9, 1939

## "Life With Father" Delightful Comedy of a Gentler New York

"Life With Father," comedy by Russel Crouse and Howard Lindsay, based on stories by the late Clarence Day, produced by Oscar Serlin at the Empire Theatre, New York, Nov. 8, 1939.

★ ★ ★

By JOHN CHAPMAN

IT IS a fortunate theatrical season that has two such plays as "The Man Who Came to Dinner" and "Life With Father," not only because they are immensely enjoyable, but also because by their very dissimilarity they make a pair.

"The Man Who, etc." is funny because it is modern and nasty-written, as it were, in indelible ink. "Life With Father," which found a perfect setting last night at the Empire Theatre, is funny because it is of an earlier and more gentle time-written, every word of it, in the milk of human affection.

As everybody must know, the basis of the comedy is the series of family sketches of the 1880's by the late Clarence Day, practically all of which appeared in The New Yorker and which were published in volumes titled "Life With Father," "Life With Mother" and "God and My Father." The adaptation has been made, with respect, with a matching humor and with a warming knowledge of the theatre, by Russel Crouse and Howard Lindsay.

### A Family Chronicle

Not exhausted by the labor of adaptation, Mr. Lindsay also essays the role of Father himself and manages it capitally. If Dorothy

Stickney, as Father's wife, contrives to steal the show it certainly must be all right with him, for Miss Stickney is Mrs. Lindsay off-stage.

You get to writing family notes like this because the play is just a lot of family notes. Father was an actual person—Clarence Day Sr., one-time governor of the Stock Exchange. A blustering, quick-tempered, important man who liked his breakfast coffee just so; a man who stamped and bellowed "Goddid!" about the house and wouldn't be baptized.

"Life With Father" hasn't much of a plot

because real families don't have any plots. They just have crises which look bad at the moment but which are amusing when others regard them from vantage points like time and orchestra seats. A red-headed tyrant with a lovable wife and four red-headed sons, he rules the roost only so long as Mrs. Day wants him to. Then she can drive him to cover with feminine illogic, blandishment, tears, or a woman's sure knowledge of when the enemy's guard is down.

### Mother's the Boss

Mr. Lindsay's father, as has been intimated, is first class—although he could do with less red makeup on the cheeks and yet look effectively apoplectic. Miss Stickney is better than first class—the perfect mistress of a Madison Avenue brownstone mansion of the 1880's.

The other players have been chosen with good theatrical sense. John Drew Devereaux, as Clarence Day, Jr., is a not to overdrawn moon-calf who falls for a girl who comes visiting with Cousin Cora; Richard Simon, as his next younger brother, has two perfect moments in which to make his voice squeak; Teresa Wright makes an attractive visiting girl, and there's a series of maids whom Father frightens into quitting.

Stewart Chaney's one setting, the morning-room of the Day house, and his costumes, are delightfully made for the time and mood of the play. Bretaigne Windust has staged it with humorous insight—and Oscar Serlin makes a happy debut as a Broadway producer.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, November 9, 1939

## Clarence Day's 'Life With Father' Dramatized by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse

By BROOKS ATKINSON

SOONER or later every one will have to see "Life With Father," which opened at the Empire last evening. For the late Clarence Day's vastly amusing sketches of his despotic parent have now been translated into a perfect comedy by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, and must be reckoned an authentic port of our American folklores. They were as genuine as that when they first appeared in The New Yorker, and later between covers in book form. In the form of a narrative drama of family life Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse have now pulled that immortal saga together, wonderfully preserving the humanity as well as the fantastic humor. Mr. Lindsay plays the part of the choleric parent with rare taste and solid heartiness, and Dorothy Stickney plays the part of the wife with enormous skill and spirit. Last evening every one was falling jubiliantly in love with a minor classic in the library of American humor.

Written and acted with infinite dexterity, "Life With Father" is no cartoon out of the funny papers. Under all his rage, Father is a representative parent with a warm regard for his sons and real affection for his wife, and his portrait might come out of any family album. What makes him so hilariously amusing to us today is the violence of his temper. He is rugged individualism in full flower—passionately logical, humorless, possessive and masterful. He is the civilized male in awful grandeur. If Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse were less discerning as play-

wrights, Father might have emerged as a cheapjack bully to be played only for the laughs. But they treat him with relish and respect against the manners of the late nineteenth century as one of the leading stewards of a materialistic civilization. His shouting and swearing are assertions of his importance as a responsible citizen in a bustling period in native history.

The story of "Life With Father" gives a rounded portrait of the Day's old man. At breakfast you hear him roaring at the new maid and frightening her out of her wits, stamping on the floor three times to summon the cook from the kitchen, and delivering a long, irate speech about taxes and politics that would scare the daylight out of any one who took the trouble to listen.

That is the fierce part of Father. But the human side turns up in the course of the evening when his wife falls unaccountably ill and for a moment or two shatters his grand self-confidence. A good egg at heart, Father can rise to any domestic occasion.

The play is strewn with family crises natural to a house full of growing boys and tire-some relatives, and Father punctuates the episodes with bellows of righteous anger. When he lets himself go, the other members of the family shiver a little, but their regard for the old codger never weakens. For he is the head of the house by virtue of his innate ability. No one questions his right to wear all the pants in the family.

In Mr. Lindsay's acting Father is completely defined. Although he is stiff, he is not pompous; although he is over-bearing, he is not insensitive. He is the high-spirited male of middle years who expresses his vitality in business-like procedure and runs the whole gamut of passion from suikness to ferocity. Miss Stickney's portrait of the wife is also brilliant acting, both sweet and witty, with a supple response to the storminess of her domestic economy. Under Bretaigne Windust's knowing direction, the performance is a thorough delight. John Drew Devereaux, as the House of Drew gives an excellent performance as the oldest son. As the gawky second son, Richard Simon is also completely enjoyable; and the same thing should be said for the other members of a splendid cast. Stewart Chaney has dressed them in costumes touched with humor and housed them in a gay nineteenth-century living room.

Clarence Day would have been proud of this stage version of his tribute to his father. The dialogue is sparkling, the story is shrewdly told, and the acting is a treasury of appreciative humor. Life with father may have been trying at black moments on Madison Avenue, but it is overpoweringly funny in the theatre. It is also enchanting, for "Life With Father" is a darlin' play.



# "Life With Father"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, November 9, 1939

## "Life With Father" Seen at the Empire

Mr. Lindsay and Miss Stickney Appear in a Hilarious  
Dramatization

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IF, AS seems indisputable, the late Clarence Day was fortunate in his parents, all the rest of us stand in the elder Days' debt for their son. For it was he, of course, who, in "Life With Father" and "God and My Father," kindly removed the brown-stone front of the New York home he had known in the eighties, and allowed the nation's readers to claim Father and Vinnie as household gods, if not indeed as household pets.

It is Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse who have had the courage to dramatize Mr. Day's inimitable domestic sketches. And all things considered, including the

bothersome preconceptions playgoers are bound to bring with them, the slowness of the introductory scene which finds the autocrat at his breakfast table, and a few later episodes which still stand in need of cutting, a heart-warming and delectable job Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse have done.

If the result is not quite the same as in the books, it is none the less hilarious, touching, and uncommonly witty and perceptive. We have Mr. Day's own lines to thank for this. And excellent, truly sustaining lines they prove to be when spoken no less than when read. Yet there is a difference. In a way Mr. Day's family has on the stage ceased to be quite so much his personal property. It has lost to a certain extent in the acting the special breeding which distinguished it. It no longer seems quite so securely anchored in a period. It has become everybody's family instead of Mr. Day's. But the change, at least from the audience point of view, is doubtless all to the good. For instead of saying how like the Days our families were, theatregoers can now say how like our families just now are the Days. In other

words, the ripple of application has altered by being widened. That is all.

### Every Family's Portrait

It is the acting, particularly the thorough competent but by no means ideal performance of Howard Lindsay as Father, which nudges the text away from its original setting. It is Mr. Lindsay's red wig; his occasional stock company tricks, and the awareness of his acting Father instead of being him, which shrivels the potted plants somewhat in the Days' delightful household, and turns that household into something of a public gardens. It is the sheer effortful work of Mr. Lindsay, and from time to time the stiff, actress-y glances Dorothy Stickney steals across the footlights, which make one realize one is sitting before greasepaint and the work of the wigmaker and the costumer instead of eavesdropping on the Days.

Still, as hinted, the play at the Empire has its countless delightful and genuinely rewarding features in spite of what Mr. Day's writings were fated to lose in performance. His truths have not lost either their

bite or their truth. Such is the wit of the acted text that it can not only sustain the changes in the major characterizations but forces one to overlook them gladly.

What one gets as one watches Father complaining about meals, losing servants, grumbling about expenses, objecting to visitors, reading the newspapers, exploding into endless tempers, suffering during his wife's illness, urging his oldest son to be firm with women, scoffing at his minister, and resolutely avoiding baptism, is a picture into which every family man fits, whether he likes to believe so or not. It is a full-length portrait of the male ego, with all of the laughable petty tyrannies exposed which that ego exercises within the fortress of those four walls over which any husband chooses to believe (and is artfully encouraged to do so) that he rules as a mixture of Von Hindenburg, the elder Rockefeller, and Santa Claus.

### A Delightful Evening

Clarence Day knew better. So did his mother, Vinnie. That is where the fun—the abundant fun—comes in for all the members of any family wise enough to journey to the Empire these nights. For "Life With Father," when once it gets going, proves to be a play of universal application of tremendous gaiety, and of sudden gusts of tender observation. Merely as a play it may be unimportant. But as a biography of every one's family, except Caspar Milquetoast's, it is as shrewdly drawn as it is ingratiating.

Stewart Chaney has set it with infinite charm. And Bretaigne Windust has directed it with a nice sense of fearful no less than comic values. Mr. Lindsay faces an almost impossible task as Father. But he plays him so acceptably in an actor's way (which would no doubt have sent Father's blood pressure soaring) that one is more than willing to accept him as a substitute for Mr. Day's courtlier parent. Mr. Lindsay is industrious, frequently skilful, and almost always satisfactory enough. But at no time is he funnier than when in moments of final (and usually lonely) exasperation he cries out loud to his Creator.

Miss Stickney is a pleasant, chirrupy, and effective Vinnie. John Drew Devereaux is exceedingly good as young Clarence Day. And Dorothy Bernard is charming as Margaret, the cook. Indeed, the family and guests are well enough suggested throughout so that there is no missing Mr. Day's enchanting sketches as Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse have adroitly assembled them in dialogic form.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, November 9, 1939

## Father

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

FROM Clarence Day's delightful sketches of his father and mother and their relations with God and man—Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse have devised a gay, easy-going and likable comedy, filled to the brim with pleasant and recognizable Americana, circa 1880. No more a play in the conventional sense than is a work tossed off by Mr. Saroyan, "Life With Father" is merely a series of homely domestic cartoons, done with humor, understanding and deep affection, and given form and unity by the dominating personality of the elder Day, the family tyrant who never won a battle. There can be little doubt that the new play will be a success, if only for the fact that every woman playgoer, recognizing her own husband in the domineering, but vanquished, Father, will delight in it vastly. It will deserve that success, too, because it is rich in Americana and zestful in characterization, virtues that more than make up for the fact that the comedy is sometimes desultory and the acting is not always as fine as it should be.

As any one who even glanced at one of the Day sketches will know, the new play is entirely dominated by Father, who rules over it in a fashion more unconquerable than he ever exercises in ruling his family. For Father, you will remember, was the least triumphant of dictators, his victories consisting chiefly of scolding off new servant girls. Domestic tyrants, even when they have hearts of gold, are not likely to be pleasant, even on the stage. Father, however, is so baffled in his rages, vanquished in his demands and beaten down in his wishes,

and yet always is so splendidly choleric and blustering about it, that he emerges as a winning, highly engaging and almost wistful fellow who is bossed so effectively by his wife and even his sons that you almost feel like coming to his help. In fact, all the episodes are considerably alike, in that they begin with Father raging and fuming and insisting on having his way and end with him in gallant but complete retreat. The fight he puts up longest is against being baptized, and even here he is battered down at last.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that Mother wins all the victories in the household, Father is unquestionably its central figure. All the life of the Days centers around him. He must have been quite a man away from home, too, because he hasn't much trouble with outsiders. When the minister, for example, tries to boss him, the clerical gentleman is sent flying in short order and Father's victory is a most

pleasant one. In fact, his feud with the deity of official religion is courageously and handsomely fought, and Father gives in finally, not through any prowess on the part of divine Providence but because Mother always seems to have had her deceptively gentle way in the Day family. You cannot help enjoying Father as he storms at the breakfast table, denounces absent political bosses, tries despairingly to explain to Mother the mystery of charge accounts, snarls at officious clergymen and is reduced from the picture of masculine strength to the picture of masculine weakness by a woman's tears. My only complaint, in addition to my feeling about Mr. Lindsay's performance in the leading role, is that the play has its share of feeble interludes during which "Life With Father" becomes a sort of minor league "Ah, Wilderness."

Mr. Lindsay, the co-author, is good enough as Father to make the role winning and indomitable, but he somehow fails to make the elder Day the epic fellow that he must have been. There is not enough power or zest or breadth of characterization; not enough of the capacity to project the racy behavior of the fabulous hero of Mr. Day's sketches. The result is that while the central characterization is attractively played, you have the feeling that the role should have somehow been invested with more richness, variety and power. The others are more successful, particularly Miss Dorothy Stickney as Mother, John Drew Devereaux as the youthful Clarence, and Richard Sims as brother John, whose voice is properly gentle ingenuity, and I can't quite forgive Father for frightening such a nice-looking young maid as Miss Katherine Bard out of the house in the first scene. "Life With Father" is an agreeable addition to the stage's collection of affectionate Americana, which might have been better but is pretty satisfying as it is.

# "Margin for Error"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, November 4, 1939

## "Margin for Error" Presents a Murder With Comic Trimmings

"Margin for Error," comedy by Clare Boothe. Produced by Richard Aldrich and Richard Myers at the Plymouth theatre, New York, Nov. 3, 1939.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

**D**ARNED clever, these Yankee dramatists. It has remained for Clare Boothe to write the first of the anti-Nazi plays that is acceptable. Her "Margin for Error" is as full of holes as a sieve, if you're looking for holes. But it is also taut and tricky enough to be entertaining.

It is Miss Boothe's idea that if the Mayor were to send a cordon of Jewish policemen to guard the person of a particularly offensive Nazi consul, that in itself would be a laugh.

But if the Nazi consul should be found dead during the exercises, and circumstantial evidence pointed to Moe Finkelstein, the one Jew on guard, that might easily give the comedy an effective, if not a tragic, twist.

And it does.

### Mystery Plant

The first act of "Margin for Error," while the murder is being planted, is straight and fairly obvious mystery stuff. Cork-handed knives that absorb finger prints; slyly purchased revolvers left loaded in handy drawers; a murder motive for every man and woman in the cast and dozens of false leads, are dutifully provided.

But, following the death of the consul at the end of the act, Comus is in the ascendant. Officer Moe takes charge of the investigation before he calls the captain. And Moe's method of procedure, as illustrated by Sam Levene, and based on an intimate study of the movies, is pretty funny.

Some competition. Some flat spots. But also a scattering of wit and sufficient drama to hold attention. At least it held the attention of the first audience to see the play at the Plymouth last night.

Otto Preminger, a stage director from old

Vienna, has been in charge of staging "Margin for Error." Not being satisfied with the menace candidates who offered to play the consul, he took that job on, too. He plays Consul Baumer, a mean hound who has been embossing Nazi funds and planning to throw the guilt on his Nazi aid, Baron von Alvenstor.

### A Complete Job

A good performance by Mr. Preminger and properly mysterious. When the consul came to his death throes he partly hid himself behind a curtain and expired with studied twitchings from gunshot, knife wounds and slug of cyanide of potassium. This made his passing practically complete.

Mr. Preminger is assisted by a cast of properly schooled actors. Mr. Levene, as reported, is amusingly explosive as the Jewish cop. He is quite as busy playing three men on a clus as he was two years ago playing three men on a horse.

Bramwell Fletcher is the suspected Baron. Bert Lytell plays a Nazi-hating physician with professional dignity. Elspeth Eric, the consul's abused wife, and Evelyn Wahle, a German maid, represent the feminine interest attractively.

Philip Coolidge is a proper clown as a bund organizer. Lief Erickson is a defiant newspaper columnist and Edward McNamara puts all his force back of the one speech he is permitted.

The setting is one of Donald Oenslager's interesting interiors.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, November 4, 1939

## Margin for Error Opens at Plymouth

Miss Boothe Seen Accomplishing Three Objectives in Play

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

**M**ISS CLARE BOOTHE seems to have had three worthy objectives in her new play, Margin for Error, with which she delighted her loyal legion of admirers at last night's opening in the Plymouth Theater—to write a good mystery play, to write a good anti-Nazi play and to write a good comedy.

That is a large order for anybody, even with Miss Boothe's talents for dramatic effect and acid humor, but she has achieved her purpose to a degree that was hardly believed possible even by her ardent admirers. The mystery is gripping, the comedy is broad and the propaganda is a Dorothy Thompson column as it might have been written by Robert Benchley.

I am given to understand that Miss Boothe disputes the assertion that Margin for Error is primarily an attack on H-r-r H-t-r or the Nazis, and the fact that it takes place in a German consulate bedecked with swastikas, busts and photographs of Der Fuehrer and that the characters are named Otto Horst, Baron von Alvenstor and Karl Baumer are strange coincidences. The program is careful to state that "no actual person, living or dead . . . and so forth and so on" is depicted in this "satirical melodrama"—a straight-faced announcement which lends an additional note of piquancy to the whole business.

I think this is, as a result of Miss Boothe's tongue-in-cheek attitude, the most present-

able and certainly the most enjoyable anti-Nazi play that has yet been devised by anyone. All the others, without exception, have failed because they bogged down either in the deadly grimness of the subject or in the sloppy swamp of sentimentality. Miss Boothe treats the entire ideology of the Reich government as something which, when the world's sense of humor is at last restored, will be laughed to death.

Nevertheless, it is as a mystery melodrama that the new work should be judged, and in this department the author of The Women and Kiss the Boys Goodbye has accomplished more than any of her fellow playwrights has done in many years. She has given us a murder story and solved it (without the aid of a courtroom scene) neatly and expeditiously,

and she keeps an audience concentrated on the problem during a greater part of the play.

The victim of her plot is an evil German consul in America who is guilty of a catalogue of sins that would require too much space to enumerate. He is an embezzler, a blackmailer, a dealer in murder and a traitor. There are six persons, in addition to the entire audience, who would like to, or have reason to, assassinate the scoundrel.

The six are: Otto B. Horst, who is about to be liquidated as American fueshrer through the consul's double-dealing; Baron von Alvenstor, the consul's assistant, who has discovered a \$250,000 shortage in his boss' accounts and who is threatened with exposure as a quarter-part Jew; Officer Finkelstein, who has been sent by a humorist mayor to guard the consulate; the consul's wife, Sophie, daughter of a Czech statesman, who is in love with an American newspaper writer named Thomas S. Denny; Denny himself, who is in love with Sophie, and a Dr. Jennings, who has been swindled by the consul.

Now that you have them all straight, the six are in the company of the consul, listening to a broadcast by Hitler, when the unloved official dies. Officer Finkelstein's investigations show that he has been shot, stabbed and poisoned, which is enough to thin almost anybody. Woodum? Well, that's for you to guess, and it would not do to spoil the solution. I merely advise you to go to the Plymouth and find out. There never was a more delightful murder.

Producers Richard Aldrich and Richard Myers have given the play a brilliant cast, and I particularly want to throw my hat in the air for Sam Levene, whose witty interpretation of the harassed Officer Finkelstein is one of the most adroit pieces of acting we have seen on Broadway this season. Bramwell Fletcher, as the Baron and Philip Coolidge as the imitation American fueshrer are expertly cast, and Evelyn Wahle, Bert Lytell, Elspeth Eric, Lief Erickson, Otto L. Preminger and Edward McNamara keep the pace rapid.

# "Margin for Error"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, November 4, 1939

## 'Margin for Error,' Clare Boothe Murder Comedy, Opens at the Plymouth

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

IT TAKES a murder to bring out the jovial streak in Miss Clare Boothe, writer of acid plays. Sheer glee animates her newest play, which opened at the Plymouth last evening and is called "Margin for Error." Amid hearty chuckles she causes the death of her central character, a Nazi not even a Hitler could love, arranging that he shall be not only shot and stabbed but also poisoned. Much innocent mirth is thus occasioned.

Miss Boothe calls "Margin for Error" a "satirical melodrama," and a Nazi diplomat took it seriously enough to register protest. He may know best, of course, but I should never have supposed so outrageous a shoe could possibly fit. Miss Boothe piles it on, both in caricature and melodrama. Her victim is a Nazi consul built up solely to be murdered. He torments his wife, double-crosses his secretary, and with harsh enjoyment defeats his henchman, a sawdust Bund leader. He steals money from his Government and loses it on the market, and when Hitler speaks he turns the radio up full and opens all the windows, determined to annoy the neighbors.

He thus provides half a dozen persons with motives for murder, and Miss Boothe with the opportunity for a barrage of witty harpoons. She uses them all, with her usual skill. Before she kills off her consul she torments him with Patrolman Finkelstein, who is sent to stand guard over him and to riddle him with com-

backs. And it is Patrolman Finkelstein who, in the end, discovers which of the numerous prospects thrust knife and fired gun. Patrolman Finkelstein proves a shrewd detective and Miss Boothe's mystery plot is sufficiently tight and expert.

There is excitement and tension in the play, and a lot of laughter and a good many moments of the sheerly preposterous. Burlesque and melodrama sometimes lie down together, and they are always uneasy bed-fellows. Now and then it is difficult to take the murder seriously enough to worry about its solution, but Miss Boothe can manage to get one in the mood for almost anything.

She works off a good deal of venom against the Nazi ideology and frequently notes that things are done much better in America,

### 'Margin for Error'

A "satirical melodrama" in two acts by Clare Boothe; directed by Otto L. Preminger; setting by Donald Oenslager; presented at the Plymouth Theater on November 3, 1939, by Richard Aldrich and Richard Myers. The cast: Otto L. Horst.....Philip Coolidge  
Baron Max von Alvenson.....Bramwell Fletcher  
Officer Finkelstein.....Sam Levene  
Frieda.....Evelyn Wahle  
Dr. Jennings.....Bert Lytell  
Sophie Baumer.....Elspeth Eric  
Karl Baumer.....Otto L. Preminger  
Thomas S. Denny.....Leif Erickson  
Capt. Mulrooney.....Edward McNamara

where a Mayor who enjoys a joke can send a policeman named Finkelstein to guard the flagrant Aryans. But here's not at bottom really an anti-Nazi play. Consul Baumer is a stage villain in Nazi clothing; his major rascalities are personal, not political. "Margin for Error" is only murder in jest, plus some of Miss Boothe's most comical insults, and probably that is enough. It isn't satire, of course, in the sense that "The Women" was satire. But Miss Boothe's terminology in such matters has never been particularly exact.

The play is excellently acted and Otto L. Preminger, who also plays the villain, has directed it inventively. Sam Levene, playing Finkelstein, does one of the grandest jobs imaginable, helped a little by the fact that Miss Boothe has given him most of the best lines. Bramwell Fletcher, Bert Lytell, Elspeth Eric, Leif Erickson and Evelyn Wahle play effectively; Philip Coolidge goes, I imagine, even beyond the author's intentions in making the Bund leader a thug of comedy, and Edward McNamara, after waiting in the wings until 11 o'clock—like a bass drummer waiting to boom—marches on with one of the grandest lines of the play just as the curtain falls.

You have to hear Hitler on the radio in the middle of it, and pretty loudly, but into each life some rain must fall.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, November 4, 1939

## Death of a Nazi

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

MISS CLARE BOOTHE, whose fine capacity for malice is not unknown, finds a proper target for her celebrated venom in "Margin for Error." After picking on such comparative set-ups as film directors, radical columnists, Southern ingenues and the entire female sex, she discovers a foe worthy of her prowess and proceeds to take on the whole Nazi movement singlehanded. Hers is quite a famous victory, too, because heretofore the Nazis have been almost consistently triumphant over the theater's attempts to pillory them for their sins. It is not that "Margin for Error" is a play of any great distinction. It is, in fact, just a smooth and showmanlike mystery melodrama, with quite a bit of primitive playwriting distributed throughout its two acts. Since, however, the theatrical season has needed both a good mystery play and an effective anti-Nazi work after all of these years, and gets both of them in one shrewd, vigorous, generally entertaining and admirably acted piece, there is reason for considerable satisfaction.

It is an excellent plot idea for a murder tale that Miss Boothe has hit upon in her new work. Her plan is to have a German consul die violently in his own consulate while the premises are being guarded by a Jewish policeman, who knows that unless he solves the mystery of the killing he will be accused of the murder by the Nazis throughout the world. Among the virtues of the tale is the fact that it solves a problem that mystery writers have been wrestling with for years. If a murder yarn is not to be made too unpleasant and the opportunities for interpolated comedy are not to seem pretty

much out of place, the victim of the slaughter must be an unsympathetic fellow, whose carrying-off will cause a minimum of unhappiness. By making him a particularly vicious Nazi agent, the massacre becomes more than bearable, and a good time can be had by all. Here you see the consul drop off in fairly good view of the audience, while surrounded by such foes as a foolish gaudier (if you will pardon the redundancy), a dashing anti-Nazi columnist, a German vice-consul, whose grandmother was a Jew, the consul's unhappy wife and a scientist whose daughter has been killed in a concentration camp. The resulting melodrama is the author's chief concern, with her usual biting comedy kept pretty much in the background.

During the first of Miss Boothe's two acts there was a reason to fear that the approaching slaughter might ruin her play. The trouble was that the wicked consul, a very monster of evil, was such an entertaining scoundrel

and he was so effectively played by Otto L. Preminger that all of us feared his end would mean an end to the play's interest. Fortunately, the pleasant Jewish policeman, delightfully played by the invariably excellent Sam Levene, took over so competently after the consul's death that the work continued to be properly entertaining. In this day when the men who solve fictional murder cases are likely to be such disagreeable characters, it is pleasant to come upon so likable a sleuth as the amiable officer Finkelstein. "Margin for Error," I should warn you, is no masterpiece of playwriting. In fact, there are times—such as the moment when the vice-consul speaks to the heroine of "the consul, your husband," just as if the poor lady didn't know it all the time, or the occasion where the gaudier thoughtfully tells the consul what the motto in German on a knife means in English—when it seems that Miss Boothe is being rather clumsy with her exposition. Nevertheless, for all its failings as drama-turgy, "Margin for Error" remains a good show.

The acting in most cases is excellent. I am afraid that Philip Coolidge is inclined to burlesque the local bund leader a bit heavily, but the others are consistently helpful. As I have said, Messrs. Preminger and Levene are particularly good. Mr. Preminger, in truth, almost stealing the show up to the time when he is violently removed from the cast. Bramwell Fletcher gives one of his best performances as the vice-consul, while Bert Lytell as the scientist, Miss Elspeth Eric as the wife, Leif Erickson as the columnist and Miss Evelyn Wahle in an attractive bit as a flirtatious consular maid are in admirable form. Edward McNamara, playing, of all things, a cop, comes on in time for the tag line, and just long enough to remind us that he should be employed more frequently, and at greater length in our drama. I think I can say that, with the arrival of "Margin for Error," another hit has reached town, just in time to save the theater's week.



# "Margin for Error"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, November 4, 1939

## "Margin for Error"

By Clare Boothe

Mr. Preminger Excellent in a Satirical Anti-Nazi Melodrama

By JOHN MASON BROWN

CLARE BOOTHE has changed her diet. Instead of sipping the adder's milk she must have drunk to write "The Women" or munching the mixed green salad of magnolia leaves and poison ivy upon which she no doubt nibbled while penning "Kiss the Boys Goodbye," she has unquestionably been devouring Dorothy Thompson.

No longer is her interest confined to female vipers, or the adventures of a goofy Southern Alice in a lecherous Northern Plunderland. Miss Boothe is now ready to deal with topics which refuse to be gone with the wind. That same Fascism which she pretended, with a gift for clairvoyance, uniquely her own, to have discovered in the Old South, she now recognizes in that New Germany and that sad new world in which it takes no crystal-gazer to comprehend the sorrows for which it has been responsible.

The result of Miss Boothe's awakening to the issue of Nazism is a melodrama, known as "Margin for Error," which Mr. Aldrich and Mr. Myers presented with an extremely capable cast and in one of Donald Oenslager's best settings at the Plymouth last evening.

Depend upon Miss Boothe, on any diet, to turn her script into what the program describes as a "satirical melodrama." Her special gift is satire. Whether she is writing of sable-draped females who ought to be led around on leashes, or the Connecticut literati, or of the wickedest of Brown Shirts, she luckily does not misplace the deadliest of her weapons. Her lethal malice, her delightful mastery of the wisecrack, is to the pleasures of her playwriting not what the cheese is to the apple pie but what the apple pie is to the cheese.

### Mr. Preminger Admirable

If "Margin for Error" can scarcely be hailed as Miss Boothe's masterpiece, it is none the less a script which, as staged and acted and apparently rewritten out of town, provides a perfectly pleasant, often arresting evening in the theatre. It is a play which shows a proper dislike for Hitler and everything that is his. Yet it is more than a routine anti-Nazi melodrama. If it is far from perfect, it none the less holds the interest because it is by intention (and often in execution) a happy mixture of indignant propaganda with a good old Cock Robin yarn. The difference—and quite a difference it makes—is that in this case Cock Robin happens in the skillful person of Otto L. Preminger not only to wear a Brown Shirt and chirp "Hell" but to have the most Teutonic of shaven heads.

Miss Boothe benefits most conspicuously by her Thompsonian diet in the first of her two acts. There she fills the library of a German

consulate "in an American city" with a quality of unmistakable evil upon which Miss Thompson herself must have looked last evening with admiration. Miss Boothe serves democracy as a champion with plenty of well-aimed acid to throw at Hitler and his henchmen. Mr. Preminger aids her, even when she needs no assistance, by making the villainous German consul so attractive dramatically that one hates to have him killed. Indeed, so fascinating is Mr. Preminger's portrait of the oily miscreant that the only pro-Fascist thing Miss Boothe can even be accused of doing in "Margin for Error" is killing off her villain so early that one regrets his absence. One wants to have him die, all right, all right, but hates to have him get his just desserts so soon.

### A Pretty Good Evening

Thereafter Miss Boothe goes in for almost straight Cock Robin cross-examinations. She has given five other characters ample motives for the murder. The bribe-taking consul's Czech-Slovakian wife, her journalist lover, a doctor whose daughter has been killed in Germany, a Jewish policeman humorously assigned to protect the consul and the consul's fair-haired aide whose grandiose plans have been discovered to have been an English Jewess—all these persons, along with the audience, have wished the consul ill. But all of them seem to have allies. So after the consul's death Miss Boothe supplies the ever-likeable Sam Levene, as the Jewish cop, with the fastest scene he has ever had trying to discover (with only occasional moments of drowsiness in the script) the identity of the murderer.

Mr. Preminger's direction, like his admirable playing, assists Miss Boothe's in many of the stiffer moments in her dialogue and the more awkward interludes in her writing. If the scene of the actual murder is clumsy, its confusion somewhat tardily proves to be intentional. Mr. Oenslager's setting captures the atmosphere as excellently as did his unforgettable Germanic background for "Overture."

And Mr. Levene as the Jewish cop, Bramwell Fletcher as the consul's aid, Bert Lytell as the embittered doctor, and Leif Erickson as the journalist add to the interest of an evening which, though not all that it might be, is none the less so much better than one had heard and at once so humorously topical and self-sufficient in its excitements that it passes the time gayly and, for the most part, tensely.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, November 4, 1939

## Clare Boothe Ambushes a German Consulate in the Melodramatic 'Margin for Error'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

HAVING disposed of women and wits in that order during the past few seasons, Clare Boothe is ambushing a German consul in "Margin for Error," which was put on at the Plymouth last evening. In the first of two acts she makes him the most odious character on the stage for the moment. In the second act she disposes of him in one of the most thorough fatalities any theatregoer has stumbled on in several seasons. Since the program prudently requests every one to keep mum about this excessive style of liquidation, this review must regretfully stay neutral on the chief fact of the evening. But it can hardly avoid the duty of reporting that "Margin for Error" is a curious and unsatisfactory mixture of political unmasking and detective story, relieved only by the witty lines written for Sam Levene, who knows how to speak them.

Don't get Miss Boothe wrong, brother. She is officially neutral. "No actual person, living or dead, is depicted or intended to be depicted in this play," says the program, which is taking no chances. And as far as

this column knows, no German consul in America fits her description of Karl Baumer, thief, blackmailer, double-crosser, traitor, shake-down artist and a couple of other things. But no one can blame Miss Boothe for amusing herself and us by stationing a guard of Jewish policemen outside the consulate and holding an impish Mayor responsible for a practical joke.

During half the evening she itemizes the

villainies of the consul so thoroughly that he ought to be glad to escape her blitzkrieg by a death of any sort. The rest of the play is a complicated and static analysis of the fatality, almost too concentrated to be followed without a diagram. But the ludicrous situation that charges a Jewish policeman with the responsibility of protecting a Nazi consul is one that provokes Miss Boothe into writing some of her most hilarious satiric lines. Particularly in the second act Sam Levene, the alarmed comic of "Three Men on a Horse" and "Room Service," has a wonderful opportunity to translate witty dialogue into rich stage humor.

As the director of an evening of who-dun-it, Otto L. Preminger has not succeeded in breaking up the solid massing of the plot; no matter what he does it refuses to move. But perhaps that is asking too much of a director, and the fact remains that, barring a certain monotony of attack, Mr. Preminger plays an excellent bald-headed, wrinkle-necked villain in the part of the infamous consul. Some of our most attractive actors are playing in this cast, with more than average distinction—particularly Bert Lytell, Bramwell Fletcher, Philip Coolidge and Elisabeth Eric. Leif Erickson is unmistakably handsome, which does no actor any harm, and Evelyn Waile is any man's temptation. In the last scene Edward McNamara, back in police uniform again, comes busting in with brogue and avoirdupois for a cheerful goodnight gag.

Thank Donald Oenslager for a setting that speaks well for a Nazi's taste in housing. Although Miss Boothe's humor equals it, her style of story-telling strangles the plot.

# "The Time of Your Life"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, October 26, 1939

## 'The Time of Your Life,' a Saroyan, Opens at the Booth Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

WILLIAM SAROYAN'S new play, "The Time of Your Life," drifted across the stage of the Booth last evening as the first play of the Theater Guild's twenty-second season. It is ambling and almost plotless; fantasy and eggs and nitwit stories, bound together very lightly with melodrama. It is two-thirds sheer delight; a third mere fumbling. And it is not for worlds to be missed.

Eddie Dowling, who is associated in the production, acts what one may guess to be the central character. He is Joe, a friendly Irishman who sits in a waterfront saloon in San Francisco and talks a little and drinks a great deal and is faintly mysterious and sometimes helpful to other people who want to live. Joe sits and people wander in and out. Nick, the bartender, leans across and watches, too. Joe's huge, simple errand boy runs preposterous errands. He gets Joe a box of toys and a map of Europe and a revolver. He gets him seven packages of chewing gum and a bag of jelly beans. Joe is a man of impulse and idiosyncrasy.

Joe is only a looker-on at what plot there is. A young prostitute, fragile and touching, drifts into the saloon and Tom, the runner of Joe's errands, falls in love with her suddenly, miraculously, fantastically. Joe helps the lovers and even staggers to his feet for them and when a lean and hungry vice raider appears Joe tries to shoot him. But the gun will not go off, and it remains for a preposterous, delightful boaster to perform the necessary deed with a pearl-handled revolver which persists in sounding a little mythical.

A dozen others wander into the saloon. A Negro boy collapses from want of food and revives to play the piano gently, broodingly.

A boy gallops to the telephone to call his girl and when she comes she is bitter and hard—and, I am sorry to add, very literary and improbable. There, as now and then elsewhere, Mr. Saroyan loses his touch, and when Mr. Saroyan loses his touch it is no halfway loss. But for the most part the conversation floats slowly and casually, retarded in rhythm and unexpectedly delightful. They discuss almost everything. They all, like Joe himself, want to get more living done and are unsure as to how to go about it.

The play drags rather often, being too long by yards. The author's efforts to deal with what he suspects are the practical problems of the theatre are usually artlessly incompetent. Some of the speeches on which he evidently banks heavily are hopelessly callow and such plot as there is seems embarrassed and out of place. And if Mr. Saroyan is getting at anything, he fails to mention it. Yet the play is engaging at its worst and at its best has a high quality of imagination.

### 'THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE'

A play in three acts by William Saroyan. Directed by Eddie Dowling and Mr. Saroyan. Settings by Watson Barratt. Presented at the Booth Theater on October 25, 1939, by the Theater Guild in association with Mr. Dowling. The cast:

|                     |                   |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| Newboy              | Ross Bagdasarian  |
| Drunk               | John Farrell      |
| Willie              | Will Lee          |
| Joe                 | Eddie Dowling     |
| Nick                | Charles De Shelm  |
| Tom                 | Edward Andrews    |
| Kitty Duval         | Julie Haydon      |
| Dudley              | Curt Conway       |
| Harry               | Gene Kelly        |
| Wesley              | Reginald Beane    |
| Lorene              | Nene Vibber       |
| Rick                | Grover Burgess    |
| Arab                | Houseley Stevens  |
| Mary L.             | Celeste Holme     |
| Krupp               | William Bendix    |
| McCarthy            | Tom Tully         |
| Kit Carson          | Len Doyle         |
| Nick's Ma           | Michelette Burali |
| Sailor              | Randolph Wade     |
| Bliss               | Cathie Bailey     |
| A Killer            | Evelyn Geller     |
| Her Side Kick       | Mary Cheffey      |
| A Society Lady      | Eva Leonard Boyne |
| A Society Gentleman | Alsworth Arnold   |
| First Cop           | Randolph Wade     |
| Second Cop          | John Farrell      |

It is extraordinarily well acted. Mr. Dowling's performance is one of his best, subtly understated and perceptive, apparently casual and yet rich with character. Julie Haydon plays the role of the prostitute with that kind of frail strength which gives all of her performances so great an appeal. Edward Andrews' Tom has the clumsy eagerness of youth and Charles De Shelm's Nick is animated and effective. Len Doyle's playing of the part of the beer-gulping Munchausen is richly comical and Curt Conway's despairing efforts to acquire his girl are pungently amusing. All the many others do well by Mr. Saroyan and the Guild, and persuade you that it doesn't matter a hoot what "The Time of Your Life" is all about. Just about people being alive, maybe.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, October 26, 1939

## Saroyan's 'The Time of Your Life' Opens Theatre Guild's Twenty-second Season

By BROOKS ATKINSON

THERE is something very precious about William Saroyan. Out of his enthusiasm for all the living comes a quality of shining beauty. His "The Time of Your Life," which the Theatre Guild put on at the Booth last evening, is only a reverie in a bar room, without much story and none of the nervous excitement of the theatre. Nothing holds this sprawling drama together except Mr. Saroyan's affection for the tatterdemalions who are in it. But his affection is no casual sentiment. It has the force of a genuine conviction about people. It is innocent at heart and creative in art. Beautifully acted by Eddie Dowling in a bar-fly role, "The Time of Your Life" is something worth cherishing—a prose poem in ragtime with a humorous and lovable point of view.

Taking a handful of undistinguished characters, Mr. Saroyan lets the talk flow out of them, and before you know it he has written a dance in praise of life. They are loitering in Nick's waterfront saloon somewhere in a frowzy corner of San Francisco. The chief one among them is a well-beeled, steady drinker who fancies that he is a student of life. He is quixotic and mystic with some oddments of philosophy rattling around in his genially befuddled head. The other

characters strike a general average—a kindly saloon-keeper, a street-walker with dreams, a colored musician, an aspiring tap-dancer, a fabulous teller of tall tales, a worried cop, a boy in love, a crazy Arab lounging in the corner.

What they do is hardly enough to fill a one-act play. But what they think interests Mr. Saroyan profoundly and is likely to interest you. For some of the warmest and heartiest comedy in the modern drama comes bubbling up through Mr. Saroyan's pungent dialogue, and although it is not

realism, it is real. He is no logician. Facts do not make much impression on his exultant mind. He is not much interested in the technique of writing drama. But his imagination is dynamic, and his sense of humor has a vast appetite. The mood of "My Heart's in the Highlands" was play and lyric. The mood of "The Time of Your Life" is city and somber. But his saloon loungers facing the world with longing and wonder are glorious company and as eloquent as a piece of music.

No wonder the producers had trouble on the road shaking the play down into some sort of stage order. Mr. Saroyan's style of impulse and inspiration fits none of the theatre's smoothest grooves. But it is difficult to see how the performance could be much truer than the one the Theatre Guild has brought to town under the dual direction of Mr. Dowling and Mr. Saroyan. In the central part Mr. Dowling gives a rich and compassionate performance in a savory vernacular that blends with the setting. Although Julie Haydon's shy, unreality of expression suits her to a play of this sort, she does not define the character of the street-walker with much insight. As a whole, the cast is excellent. It includes some memorable scenes by William Bendix, Len Doyle, Gene Kelly, Tom Tully, and Reginald Beane. Watson Barratt has given it a flavorsome setting.

Probably Mr. Saroyan will learn more about the theatre the longer he stays in it. Any one can see that "The Time of Your Life" does not use the stage efficiently. But there is no more than a pedantic reflection on the waywardness of Mr. Saroyan's genius. For he is creative, which is the most precious thing in any art, and he has rubbed his elbows in life without losing his spirit.

# "The Time of Your Life"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, October 26, 1939

## "The Time of Your Life"—or A Goofy Binge With Saroyan

"The Time of Your Life," play by William Saroyan, produced at the Booth Theatre, New York, Oct. 25, 1939, by the Theatre Guild in association with Eddie Dowling.

★ ★ ★  
By JOHN CHAPMAN

THIS notice about a play by William Saroyan, which opened last night at the Booth Theatre, has to start off on a personal note with pardon asked in advance. Did you ever go out on a party and get very tight and have all sorts of amusing things happen—and never, from the next day on, quite remember what made it so much fun?

If you did, you might in telling about it afterward say you had the time of your life, but if pressed for details as to why you had the time of your life you'd never remember anything much. All you know is that most of it was fun while it lasted.

So it is, with Mr. Saroyan's "The Time of Your Life." It is screwy, it is chopped-up, one or two of its scenes are pretty bad let-downs and only the most serious of the playgoers will try to read a weighty message into it. If old Kit Carson, who is a fabulous character in the play, suddenly emerged from the cuspidor under the brass rail and asked me what was the message, all I could say is it reminds me of Don Marquis' mehitabel, the cat, who said, "wotthehell, archy, wotthehell."

Mr. Saroyan, who, after missing one try, now becomes the Salvador Dali of the theatre, has chosen for his scene a saloon on the San Francisco waterfront where anything can happen. A drunk falls down the steps from the swinging door, looks around the place, goes to the public phone, feels in the return slot for a forgotten coin and gets thrown out by Nick, the proprietor.

Nick devotes himself to his best customer, a mysterious drunk who has plenty of money and sits at the middle table and drinks

champagne. A place like Nick's would never have champagne if it weren't for this mysterious drunk with plenty of money.

And while the drunk sits there more things happen. The drunk's Man Friday—or secretary or bodyguard, as many New York night clubbers would call him—falls in love with a prostitute after one look. A hooper comes in, looking for a job and selling himself big as a comedian. Nick wants to know if he's funny and the hooper says he is, but "nobody has a sense of humor any more."

A starving colored boy comes in and, after a little free food, turns out fine music on the saloon piano. A vice squad cop comes in—the patsy of the play. If you're a liberal-minded playwright and want to pop at something the best clay pigeon is always some sort of reformer, so the vice squad cop is a setup for Mr. Saroyan.

Kit Carson drops in with Buffalo Bill whiskers, blue jeans and tall tales of what he did in 1893. An uptown couple arrive for

a few moments of uncomfortable slumming. A youth who has worked out a system for beating the pinball machine finally beats the funniest caricature of a pinball machine Mr. Saroyan could imagine. Which is plenty funny.

The champagne drunk weathers it all, looking upon everything and everybody with complete good nature and engaging kindness.

It is all crazy, by ordinary measurements of play construction—but certainly no more odd than Eugene O'Neill's asides in "Strange Interlude" many years ago, and definitely not so self-consciously serious. Mr. Saroyan can be vivid and quick and amusing. He knows saloons, he knows people, he is a prodigal with incident and observation.

Eddie Dowling, as the champagne drunk and as co-director with the author, scores sweet. As a director his timing is expert. As an actor his understatement is admirable, as it was in "Here Come the Clowns."

Julie Haydon, as the prostitute, is a little too nice and a little less colorful to be a good one. The many other parts—mostly short, vivid bits—are admirably cast. Charles De Shein as the saloonkeeper; Edward Andrews as the Man Friday; Gene Kelly as the hooper; Len Doyle as Kit Carson; Houseley Stevens Sr. as a harmonica-playing Arab—these and several others make the most they can out of little time.

"The Time of Your Life" slips badly once in a while. One scene, in the prostitute's bedroom, seems unnecessary and out of key. Occasionally a fragment of dialogue is pretty hammy. But on the whole I think it is exciting theatre. You'll either hate it like anything and scold the friend who recommended it or you'll like it a lot.

The barroom set by Watson Barratt is nicely in character with the play. But they might put some lights outside the swinging doors so one could tell it is a street entrance, different by day than from night.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, October 26, 1939

## Barroom Talk

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

MR. SAROYAN'S new play is a delight and a joy. A sort of cosmic vaudeville show, formless, plotless and shamelessly rambling, it is a helter-skelter mixture of humor, sentimentalism, philosophy and melodrama, and one of the most enchanting theatrical works imaginable. Pulling together these stray, curiously lyric meanderings on life, love and the world into one touching and eloquent whole is not so much the central character of a boozy interlocutor at a philosophical minstrel show or the sentimental bar-room wherein most of the talking takes place, but the author's genuine and moving love for the human race. It is a real and passionate love, not an idealistic literary conceit, and it fills all of "The Time of Your Life" with the glow of true affection. Often enormously funny, often tremendously touching but always heartily and richly alive, the new Saroyan work is a dramatic composition of beauty and originality that has the great virtue of possessing a heart. Beautifully played by Mr. Dowling and an excellent cast, it is an honor to American dramatic writing.

It seems that people sometimes proclaim that they have difficulty in discovering what Mr. Saroyan is writing about. Well, "The Time of Your Life" is about life and love and loneliness and striving and the desire of simple human beings for peace and beauty. It is about the essential kindness of small people; the love of life and the brotherhood of men expressed, not in political or esthetic terms, but in the hopes, the desires, and the

fears of men and women who are lost and alone. To his philosophical barroom Mr. Saroyan brings a strange selection of men of good will, which to him means that they are filled with the wonder and the mystery of existence and are bewildered by the strange existence of those who are dead to that wonder and mystery. Presiding over these drunkards, wastrels, liars, madmen and prostitutes who are Mr. Saroyan's elect is a philosophical alcoholic of means, who drinks because it keeps him from bothering about the petty things of life and guides the talkers in their discussions.

All young playwrights who write about prostitutes must grow beerily sentimental about them, and Mr. Saroyan presents us with one of the more sentimentalized versions. In fact, the girl even causes him to

leave his fine barroom for one scene, which is a great mistake, for the shift makes for an episode, excellent in itself, which interrupts the mood of the drama. But it is about this girl that what plot there is in "The Time of Your Life" centers, about the love of a clumsy young truck driver for her and her final deliverance by means of some comforting melodrama. Chiefly, however, Mr. Saroyan is interested not in plot but in people, and the resulting work proves how completely unnecessary plot can be when a playwright really has something to feel and express. I believe that there are even those who look upon Mr. Saroyan as a "highbrow" playwright. Nothing could be more untrue. "The Time of Your Life" is too tender and heart-breaking and honestly emotional and too filled with fine, robust humor to be anything but a good show.

The casting of the play, an all-important matter in a work wherein characterization bulks so large that even the bit roles are vital, seems to me excellent. Playing a character not unreminiscent of the one portrayed so movingly in the somewhat similar "Here Come the Clowns," Mr. Dowling gives the simple, honest, straightforward and lovable performance that we have come to expect of him. Miss Julie Haydon, rather surprisingly cast as the romantic prostitute, provides another of her finely chiseled characterizations, and the other players, some of whom it is difficult to identify in the program, are admirable. There must be particular word for Charles De Shein as a delightful bartender, Edward Andrews as the interlocutor's bewildered young helper, Len Doyle as a W. C. Fields-like adventurer, Miss Celeste Holmes and Miss Cathie Bailey as two visitors to the place, John Farrell as a drunkard and the actors who play the Negro piano player and the dancing comic. "The Time of Your Life" is a great comfort.



# "The Time of Your Life"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, October 26, 1939

## Eddie Dowling in "The Time of Your Life"

Mr. Saroyan's Charming New Play Excellently Done by the Guild

By JOHN MASON BROWN

WILLIAM SAROYAN continues to serve the theatre well. He has much to bring to it—his vitality, his compassion, his originality, his courage, his genuine writing skill, his love of people and of words, and his magical ability to create a mood which in itself not only makes a comment but takes the place of plot.

"My Heart's in the Highlands" showed what Mr. Saroyan could do to extend the theatre's dimensions. In it he wrote a fantasy about mankind's eternal hunger for beauty which was more of a melody than a play. In it he got happily beyond the Q. E. D.'s of playwrighting a la Pinero. He orchestrated his theme instead of plotting it. He kept it floating in the happy realm of music where it should have remained unchallenged by those literalists in our playhouses who are so busy trying to find out at every moment what this-and-that is about that they never give either this or that a chance to do anything to them in its own emotional rights.

What Mr. Saroyan did charmingly about beauty and the dispossessed in "My Heart's in the Highlands" he has done even more charmingly on the subject of the purpose of existence and the pursuit of happiness in "The Time of Your Life." His new play offers an uncommon and delightful experience in theatregoing. It is at once gleeful and heartbreaking, tender and hilarious, probing and elusive.

It is, one suspects, the kind of drama Philip Barry meant to write and came near to writing in last season's "Here Come the Clowns." It, too, finds a playwright looking

into the heart of life. But where Mr. Barry lost his way in the philosophical confusions of his brave allegory, Mr. Saroyan steers a surer, simpler course, if only by virtue of the ever-warming tenderness of his writing.

### The Pursuit of Happiness

To respond to "The Time of Your Life" one does not have to know precisely what it is about. One only has to be willing to feel. It is a quickening play—gay, tragic, and filled with revelations even when it may seem meaningless. Its people—all characters wandering in and out of a saloon on San Francisco's waterfront—are not greasepaint creations. They have blood in their veins, real air in their lungs and joy in their hearts. They leap to life as Mr. Saroyan with a vigor matched only by the suddenly

revealing sensitivity of his perceptions, states their small hopes, their secret pleasures, their mean worries, and minor tragedies.

For those who feel cheated if they have no easy Jack and Jill saga to carry home with them, Mr. Saroyan tells a story. It is the story of how a man, a strange, kindly, and inquiring fellow, a delectable, heart-sick, Irish Mr. Fix-It, whose search is for happiness and an answer to the far-reaching enigmas of life, saves a two-dollar prostitute from the prying of an odious busybody on the Vice Squad and marries her off to his amiable henchman.

But to pretend that "The Time of Your Life" is only concerned with such a story is to miss its point and tell the basest of base lies. It is a formless play. It suffers somewhat by the unnecessary change of scene in the second act which for the moment removes it from its saloon setting. It has its undeniable moments of monotony. And it includes two characters as feebly written as are its two unfortunate rich people.

### A Delightful Evening

Yet, formless or not, Mr. Saroyan's script has enormous vigor. It has beauty, too. And its compassion is as irresistible as its humor is gay or its insight is exceptional. Such scenes as the ones in which the policeman describes his hatred of his duties, or the prostitute is brought toys, or a longshoreman talks of literature and brawn, or an Arab plays on a Jew's harp music that reveals a race's sadness long ago, are only outstanding moments in an evening that is deeply rewarding.

For it is Mr. Saroyan, with all the fine, eruptive beauties of his somewhat impromptu writing, the only contributor to the evening's many pleasures at the Booth. The Theatre Guild, Eddie Dowling's and Mr. Saroyan's aid, has staged "The Time of Your Life" extremely well in an admirable setting by Watson Barratt. Mr. Dowling is touching and winning as the Mr. Fix-It whose quest is for happiness. Julie Hayden brings all her lovely phosphorescent qualities to the playing of the prostitute. Gene Kelly proves himself a dancer of remarkable grace and versatility as a job-seeker on the waterfront. And Charles De Shelm, Edward Andrews, Len Doyle and Micheleite Burani are among the many others who add to the delights of a peculiarly touching and joyous production.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, October 26, 1939

## Time of Your Life Opens at Booth Theater

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

WILLIAM SAROYAN'S flying trapeze swings a little closer to earth in *The Time of Your Life*, and through a greater part of the new Dowling-Guild play that opened last night at the Booth Theater this daring young man condescends to talk understandable language and develop understandable situations. In other words, he has written a play.

I am as favorably impressed, in fact, with this year's three-act comedy-drama as I was puzzled and petulant over last year's *My Heart's in the Highlands*. It seems to me that Mr. Saroyan has learned much from his first experience with the stage and that he has profited by what he has learned—although, since I find myself praising rather than condemning, I am aware that Mr. Saroyan will say that it is I who have been educated—not he.

At any rate, Mr. Saroyan seems to have acquired a new and important rule, and that is that lucidity is a prime requisite in play writing, and that words however beautiful in themselves, must be accompanied by ideas if they are to be effective.

This is not to say that he has surrendered any of his irresistible urge to literary prankishness. He has a gleeful, impish delight in exposing life's incongruities. He delights in stuffing philosophy into the mouths of bums and refuting the sages with the words of half-wits. He delights in finding beauty in a waterfront dive, exalting the lowly and the down-trodden and deflating the high-born and the self-consecrated.

So, in this instance, he has taken the soul of a San Francisco saloon and exposed it with the pretense that here is the real, unadulterated soul of all humanity, mellow, contented and even happy when it is left to its own de-

VICES—and vices—and malcontent and rebellious only when it is interfered with by the forces of stern and bitter reform.

I do not pretend to a complete understanding of the point—if any—Mr. Saroyan is trying to make in this play, but I do say that *The Time of Your Life* is at least susceptible to interpretation, which *My Heart's in the Highlands* was not.

It would seem to me, in an attempt to decipher the fascinating puzzle (for it is fascinating) of the new play, that Mr. Saroyan has created the soul of his saloon in the character of the genial loafer, Joe. The dreams of every habitue of such a dive are centered and brought to life in this character. He has money. He drinks champagne. He buys newspapers that are never read and plenty of good, long panatella cigars. He buys toys and sets little dancing men jiggling on the table. He wins money on long shots at the races. He takes two-dollar trollope out of their dingy flop-houses and puts them up in hotels de luxe

and eventually marries them off to kind, if somewhat goofy, truck drivers. He listens with kindly belief to the wild improbabilities poured into a sympathetic ear by grizzled bar flies. When he is bored he whistles away the time happily by playing tearfully sentimental ballads over and over again on the nickel-in-the-slot victrola.

This honest genius of the saloon is a better man in every way, according to Mr. Saroyan, than your vicious snooper of the vice squad, who drops in periodically to badger the girls and make life miserable for the proprietor. Mr. Saroyan's feelings are stoutly expressed in the bartender's speech to the snooper, wherein he declares with fine indignation that "you're out to change the world from something bad to something worse—something like yours!"

The play has its usual quota of Saroyan-esque surprises as, for example, the opening line of a curious character calling himself Kilt Carson, who "once rode herd on a two-acre ranch in Toledo on a bicycle." This delightful liar introduces himself by taking a seat at Joe's table and inquiring, "I don't suppose you ever fell in love with a midget weighing only 33 pounds?"

The *Time of Your Life* has the advantage of an acting interpretation that is a sheer delight to watch. Eddie Dowling, as Joe, carries over into this character the simple, natural, restrained and effective manner that made his work in *Here Come the Clowns* one of the outstanding performances of last year. Here, ladies and gentlemen, is an artist. I wish, however, that Miss Julie Hayden would not play her Kiddy Duval as though she were still the servant Bridget in the Canon's study of *Shadow and Substance*.

Although the others in the large cast were fully competent a special word of compliment is due Charles De Shelm as Nick, the bartender, and Len Doyle as the story-telling Kilt Carson.

That the *Time of Your Life* will arouse the usual controversy I have no doubt. The best recommendation I can give it is that I would be happy to see it again.

# "Too Many Girls"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, October 19, 1939

## 'Too Many Girls' Opens With a Score by Rodgers and Hart Under George Abbott's Direction

By BROOKS ATKINSON

AS IF such a thing were possible, George Abbott is calling it "Too Many Girls," and it opened at the Imperial last evening. Rodgers and Hart have put their heads together over an old piano in the interests of a good knockabout score, and George Marion Jr. has stitched up a college rag for story. If you are martinet about musical comedies, you are welcome to a few reservations if they make you feel better. But even the martinets can hardly remain indifferent to the breezy impudence of Mr. Abbott's newest boy-and-girl show, with some especially jaunty dancing, and some likely young fry in the chief places. A little weak on the distasteful

Eastern moneybags. Although you will not be surprised to hear that one of them falls in love with her, you will be pleased to know that football crises and the natural proclivities of co-eds in college, keep the dancers on their toes and the costumes whirling.

As for story, it settles down at old Pottawatomie in New Mexico, where Raoul Pene du Bois can pour Mexican colors into his costumes and Jo Mielziner can worship the sun in his settings. Mr. Marion's plot has something to do with four Eastern football players who go to Pottawatomie as secret bodyguards to protect the daughter of an

Rodgers and Hart are doing well, too. They knew how to open a show with a chorus prelude that is not hackneyed. Forgive them for a little exotic music like "My Prince,"

which is hard to sing and hardly worth it. But they make amends almost immediately with a bawling caricature of college anthems, playing rhyming jokes on Pottawatomie. They shake the maracas in a Mexican tune or two, and swing briskly into the finale with something notably witty to say about New York in "Give It Back to the Indians." What delighted the audience most last evening was a musicologist's witty lament, "I Like to Recognize the Tune," which calls attention to the fact that bands are killing music. They are so brilliant that they keep you from hearing what the composer has written.

All this music-making Mr. Abbott has caught up in the excitement of a notably well-staged show. His football musketeers are excellent company; they have none of the tired mannerisms of conventional performing. Eddie Bracken and Richard Kollmar are exuberant comedians unspooled by cleverness. As a South American broken-field runner, Desi Arnaz is a good wooer of women. And Hal Le Roy, as every one knows, is a superb dancer with a personality that makes friends and influences people. Marcy Westcott sings the romantic songs prettily in the spirit of a willow frolic. But this column feels regretfully less amiable about the brassy assurance of Mary Jane Walsh's manner and Diosa Costello's imitation of the less engaging side of Lupe Velez's abandon.

Probably it would be impolite to suggest that some of the humor is too anatomical for quick enjoyment. It is bad taste to mention such things in theatrical reviews. Let us conclude by complimenting Robert Alton for the vivacious dancing and say thanks to Mr. Abbott, "Prexy of Pottawatomie," for a cheerful evening.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, October 19, 1939

## Bring Out the Cheer Section For the Hit, "Too Many Girls"

"Too Many Girls," musical comedy by George Marion, Jr., with music and lyrics by Lorenz Hart and Richard Rodgers. Produced by George Abbott at the Imperial Theatre, New York. Oct. 18, 1939.

By BURNS MANTLE

WELL, sir, they had the cheer section out last night for "Too Many Girls" at the Imperial. It is, I think, the freshest and most youthful of musical comedies to be brought to Broadway since Laurence Schwab produced a piece called "Good News" some seasons back.

I saw it first, you may recall, in New Haven some weeks ago. It seemed then quite ready for Broadway, but George Abbott, who is the lucky producer, wanted to polish it up a bit.

The last act moves with more celerity than it did when it was new and there is a stunning reprise number sung by Eddie Bracken following Marcy Westcott's and Richard Kollmar's popular number, "I Didn't Know What Time It Was."

I hope, too, that a somewhat confused second act finale has been cleaned up. It came too late for me to stay and see last night.

### Exciting Doings

The first act finale, an exciting bolero number danced infectiously and with mounting enthusiasm by the ensemble, started the cheers last night.

A chief virtue of any musical comedy, it seems to me, is the sanity of its book. Liberties must be taken, naturally, if there are to be song interjections and dance interludes. But still you will notice that all the most

successful musical plays have boasted as sane a story as a good comedy.

George Marion Jr. has provided such a story for "Too Many Girls" and Mr. Abbott has cast it expertly. Marcy Westcott, the daintiest of the current prima donnas, is a temperamental daughter of wealth who decides she will take her education from her father's alma mater at Stop Gap, N. M., and give Vassar the go-by.

Father, fearful lest his unruly child get into trouble so far from home, hires four football players to watch over Marcy without letting her know their mission. The four bodyguards happen to be All-American football players and just naturally get mixed up with Pottawatomie's football schedule.

Marcy, of course, falls in love with the most lyrical of them.

Then, just before the big game of the year, with half of New Mexico wagered that Pottawatomie will beat Tennessee, Marcy finds out about the bodyguard, decides, as heroines will, that she has been made a fool of, and orders her hired hands not to play.

Rodgers and Hart, who were co-education's gift to college life themselves some years back, have studied this workable story with a collection of their best tunes and lyrics.

You are going to hear a lot of "Love Never Went to School," "Spic and Spanish," "The Sweethearts of the Team," "I Didn't Know What Time It Was," and "Pottawatomie" before the Winter melts into Spring. And, I think, for a good spell after Spring has arrived.

In addition to Miss Westcott and Mr. Kollmar, there is that likable juvenile, Eddie Bracken, and the most skillful of the rubber-ankled dancers, Hal Le Roy.

Also there is Mary Jane Walsh, who tosses out the more pointed of Mr. Hart's lyrics with spirit and clear diction, and Diosa Costello, a peppery child from Cuba seeking refinement in American contacts. I trust, and singing and dancing with attractive abandon. Adding a touch to the Southwestern atmosphere is a handsome chap who plays the guitar for Diosa, one Desi Arnaz, a favorite, I hear, of the more expensive night spots. A trio of helpful regulars are Clyde Fillmore, James McCall and Hans Robert.

The Mielziner settings are handsome, the Robert Alton dance direction inspiring, the costumes by Rene Pene Du Bois quite beautiful.

# "Too Many Girls"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, October 19, 1939

## 'Too Many Girls,' an Abbott Musical, Opens at the Imperial Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

GEORGE ABBOTT sent another of his varsity teams romping out on the stage of the Imperial Theater last evening and the boys and girls engaged in high jinks all over the place. They kicked up their heels and their voices, sang the words of Lorenz Hart to the music of Richard Rodgers and pattered briskly through a plot arranged for their benefit by George Marion Jr. Their frolic is called, not very gallantly as it seems to me, "Too Many Girls."

There aren't too many girls, really; just about the right number for a bustling musical, and all the right shape to wear Raoul Pene Du Bois's soft-hued and graceful costumes. Most of them turn out to be co-eds at Pottawatomie College, way down in Stop Gap, New Mexico, which is so dear to the hearts of the alumni that they eagerly sing of it. They sing, among other things, that "any little tot of me will go to Pottawatomie," or Pot for short. All the tots of Mr. Abbott do go, in accordance with Mr. Marion's plot.

The plot concerns, pretty amusingly, three All-America football players who hire on as bodyguards for the explosive Consuelo Casey, whose father has \$7,500 more than Mr. Ford and a bad case of jittery whenever he looks at Consuelo. She goes to Pottawatomie and the All-Americans go, and eventually Pottawatomie runs up the greatest number of points, for and against, of any college in the country.

Plenty of jokes go with this, and plenty of songs and, obviously, plenty of girls. Hal LeRoy dances once or twice and Marcy Westcott sings some of the nicest songs, including "I Didn't Know What Time It Was" and part of "I Like to Recognize the Tune." Mary Jane Walsh sings others, like the pleasant lampoon on New York called "Give It Back to the Indians." Diosa Costello dances herself all out of shape, and also sings; Richard Kolimar is a boyish lover and Eddie Bracken, a member of one of Mr. Abbott's straight teams, manages the comedy handily.

Mr. Marion and Mr. Abbott have seen that it never gets sluggish or plot-heavy and Jo Mielziner has joined with Mr. Du Bois in

### 'TOO MANY GIRLS'

A musical comedy in two acts; book by George Marion, Jr.; music by Richard Rodgers; lyrics by Lorenz Hart; scenery and lighting by Jo Mielziner; costumes by Raoul Pene Du Bois; stage managed by Robert Alton; directed by George Abbott, and presented by Mr. Abbott on October 18, 1939, at the Imperial Theater.

The cast:  
Mrs. Tewksbury ..... Ivy Scott  
Manuelito ..... Desi Arnaz  
Clint Kelley ..... Richard Kolimar  
First co-ed ..... Mildred Law  
Second co-ed ..... Leonora Sola  
Third co-ed ..... La Verne Lupton  
Fourth co-ed ..... Diane Sinclair  
Fifth co-ed ..... Key Taylor  
Sixth co-ed ..... Vera Fern  
Jojo Jordan ..... Eddie Bracken  
Al Terwilliger ..... Hal LeRoy  
Harvey Casey ..... Clyde Fillmore  
Mr. Lister ..... Hans Robert  
Consuelo Casey ..... Marcy Westcott  
Sheriff Andalusi ..... Byron Shores  
Eileen Eilers ..... Mary Jane Walsh  
Tallulah Lou ..... Lella Ernst  
Sus ..... Mildred Law  
Students ..... Van Johnson  
Co-ed ..... Libby Bennett  
Pepe ..... Diosa Costello  
Beverly Waverly ..... James MacColl  
Deputy Sheriff ..... John M. Lee  
Cowboy ..... Edison Rice  
Hawker ..... Harry Jackson

keeping it good to look at. Mr. Rodgers has done a little better now and then in the past, I think—in "I Married an Angel" and "The Boys from Syracuse," among others. "Too Many Girls" hasn't the distinction of these, or the grace. But it's lively and good looking and a lot of the time it is funny. Its spirit is always youthful and exuberant, and it wears its musical comedy sentiment with a gay and jaunty air.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, October 19, 1939

## Too Many Girls Is Cheerful, Bright

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

GEORGE ABBOTT'S Too Many Girls, which is a misnomer because there simply can't be too many girls of the sort George Abbott puts on the stage at the Imperial, turns out to be a frolic on the campus of Pottawatomie College, at Stop Gap, N. M., and, as was suggested to me last night by a connoisseur of musical shows, it is somewhat reminiscent of Princeton Triangle and Harvard Hasty Pudding theatricals.

What Mr. Abbott has attempted, however, is a satire on the romantic and heroic "college life" shows of 20 years ago, and viewed in that light, he has succeeded in giving us something that is invariably cheerful and bright, flashing in its colors, dashing in its dances, smart in much of its dialogue.

This is another Rodgers and Hart production, accompanying a wholly unimportant book by George Marion, Jr. Mr. Hart's lyrics boast their usual facile rhyming (songs about Eddie Duchins and Elsa Maxwell's two chins, for example) and an Ogden Nashian sense of humor. Mr. Rodgers' tunes, swung a little harder than those of last year's astonishing Boys From Syracuse, are again captivating, although nowhere in the score do I find anything so melodic as "This Can't Be Love or Sing for Your Supper, which was last year's hit. The music, in brief, will have more appeal to the wild men and women of the campus than to some of us old men whose breath is getting short.

But Too Many Girls has its brilliance, and this is largely contributed by the effort of a group of enthusiastic youngsters whom Mr.

Abbott has been gathering about him and nursing along ever since they (the boys, that is) were in short pants.

Among them, for instance, is Eddie Bracken, who comes into musical comedy from the so-called legitimate end of Mr. Abbott's play producing. Young Mr. Bracken, whose natural sense of comedy was ably demonstrated in Brother Rat and What a Life, carried the burden of making collegiate humor seem funny without being soporific, which is, no small task, and he succeeds admirably.

Then there is Hal LeRoy, whose dancing is so extraordinary that it would make the most phlegmatic of musical comedy habitués sit up and take notice. Richard Kolimar, who burst upon Broadway as the juvenile lead in Knickerbocker Holiday, once more gives an excellent performance with an opportunity to make ample use of a good voice and a pleasing personality.

On the side of the angels, moreover, we have the charming sylph, Marcy Westcott, and that rollicking roisterer, Mary Jane Walsh, whose career has grown more and more interesting (and more and more important to the musical comedy world) since she stopped the show in "I'd Rather Be Right a couple of seasons ago.

Miss Walsh has several big moments, among them a number entitled "The Sweethearts of the Team, in which she and her lovely colleagues are made to bemoan the fact that a man in football training has neither time nor inclination for amatory exercise. Another song, in which she is joined by Mr. Bracken, Miss Westcott, Mr. Kolimar and Mr. LeRoy, is called "I Like to Recognize the Tune, and is a justifiable complaint against the swing-murders of the nation's music. I liked that, and so did everybody else. Miss Walsh's other striking number is "Give It Back to the Indians, a more or less topical discussion of the evil days upon which Broadway seems to be falling.

In keeping with the Pan-American good-neighbor policy, which reaches some sort of climax in the rapprochement between Carmen Miranda and Broadway, Mr. Abbott brings into the cast a vivid little girl named Diosa Costello and a more personable young man of more than ordinary capabilities, known as Desi Arnaz, individually and as a team, this young couple bring the Latin temperament that is necessary to a show whose scenes are laid in New Mexico.

The dancing is superb, and compliments are due Robert Alton, whose choreography is novel and spectacular. Raoul Pene Du Bois is responsible for the costuming, which is as colorful as Jo Mielziner's adobe sets.

As with all of Mr. Abbott's productions, this one has speed, good timing and touches of comedy that are manifestly from his own deft direction.

I cannot and this report without a postscript to the effect that Lella Ernst, whose biography is a social register document, lives down that handicap and proves that even the lovely children of the rich often have talent as well as beauty.



# "Too Many Girls"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, October 19, 1939

## George Abbott Presents "Too Many Girls"

A Delightful Musical by Rodgers and Hart at the Imperial

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IF YOU can imagine the knowing freshness of the first "Garrick Galettes" combined with the thundering, undergraduate exuberance of "Good News," you may have some notion of the speed, the sparkle, the high spirits, and the contagious youthfulness of "Too Many Girls." It teems with the young. But it proves to be a hatchery in which, at least so far as talent is concerned, even the smallest minnows are large.

Its youngsters are exceptionally pleasant people. They have enough vitality to supply all the cheer leaders up and down the country, not to forget the football teams or the nation's swing addicts. Yet they have more—much more—to offer than mere energy. If their thyroids are in the pink of condition, so are their gifts. Not only can they sing, dance and act but they happen to be singing, dancing, and acting in a musical comedy which can boast all the adult virtues of the best, most smooth-running, professional product.

For "Too Many Girls" has been directed with unerring skill by George Abbott. It sways—and sets you swaying—to some of the most enchanting music the gifted Mr. Rodgers has written. And it forces you to rock with laughter at some of Mr. Hart's most felicitous and audacious lyrics. Furthermore, its dances have been inventively staged by Robert Alton; its backgrounds show all the customary skill of Mr. Mielziner; and its costumes are the colorful contributions of Raoul Pene Du Bois.

Then, also, "Too Many Girls" has a book by George Marion Jr. which, though it nods at moments as to do the books of most musical comedies, is filled with good lines and excellent opportunities. It is all about four collegians—one from Harvard, one from Yale, one from Princeton, and one a talented athlete from the Argentine who is sought by the others as a recruit for their respective

football teams. Instead of playing in Eastern stadiums, the four young men go West as hired bodyguards to watch over a contrary heiress. Out there they end up not only by making their touchdowns for Cupid but by becoming the gridiron heroes of a mythical co-educational institution, known as Pottawatomie College, which is situated at Stop Gap, N. M.

### Three Long Cheeps for Pottawatomie

The truth is Mr. Marion's story is not at all as depressing as it may sound. One does not have to be a permanent undergraduate, a class reunion-attender, a coonskin coat-wearer, a class baby, or even a football fan to enjoy it. One needs only to be looking for a good time. And any one who is not a somber should, I think, be able to find it at the Imperial.

Mr. Marion's book is lively, diverting enough, and rich in the chances it gives to a whole stufel of young actors to strut their dynamic stuff. But what really forces you to hurry and matriculate at Pottawatomie is the charm of the music and lyrics by Mr. Rodgers and Mr. Hart. Mr. Abbott's careful direction, and the gleeful performances turned in by a company of unusually agreeable and talented young people.

There is Marcy Wescott, who brings her lyric loveliness—and a beguiling beauty it is—to singing and playing the heiress. There is Diosa Costello for Latin sultriness; Lella Ernst for smiling gaiety, and Mary Jane Walsh for sheer and certain drive. Then among the lettered and playing the heiress. Bracken, who is as likable a junior comic as you are apt to encounter; Richard Kollmar, who sings and acts ingratiatingly; Desi Arnaz, who is at once attractive and modest; and Hal LeRoy, whose dancing is worthy of Jack Donahue.

All in all it is an astonishingly good co-educational team at the Imperial which makes so many laughing touchdowns that you are left with no other choice than to want to claim Pottawatomie as your Broadway Alma Mater.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, October 19, 1939

## College Days

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

ONCE again George Abbott, with the usual valiant assistance from Rodgers and Hart, provides us with a first-rate musical comedy. Gay, tuneful, attractively acted and generally enlivening, "Too Many Girls" is as pleasing a girl-and-music carnival as the theatrical season is likely to offer. It is not another "Boys From Syracuse," and the score is not exactly top-grade, Rodgers, but even when this enormously talented young composer is at his second best he is better than almost any one in sight. And the music of "Too Many Girls" is too delightful to be described properly by any term so unfriendly as "second best." Not a score that contains, for example, such numbers as "I Like to Recognize the Tune" and a splendid romantic song called "I Didn't Know What Time It Was." With such pleasant players as Miss Marcy Wescott, Richard Kollmar, Eddie Bracken, Hal LeRoy and a young Cuban known as Desi Arnaz, the new musical show should be a joy and a comfort to all of us.

There is no reason why the collegiate football background should bother any one. Indeed to find a musical comedy filled with off-stage athletic encounters and pep meetings at good old Pottawatomie brings back pleasant memories of the days of the classic "Good News" and makes grouchy veteran playgoers feel young again. I don't think that the book provided by George Marion Jr. is anything startling. In fact, I suspect Mr. Marion of being a less satisfactory librettist for such shows than William Shakespeare. Nevertheless, the narrative of "Too Many

Girls" is sufficiently gay and unostentatious to make a proper framework for a musical comedy that features youth in its less annoying aspects. The only trouble usually to be found in plays dealing with undergraduates is that the actors are too offensive in their hard-working juvenility. Since the players in "Too Many Girls" are extremely likable, this matter of youth becomes an asset, rather than the customary liability, and adds to the good fun of the occasion.

In case there is some one who is seriously interested in the book of a musical comedy, I should tell you that Mr. Abbott's show is all about four young football stars who are hired by a rich man to act as bodyguards for his undergraduate daughter at Pottawatomie. This important item having been disposed of, we can go on to the more im-

portant matter of the music. As I have noted, my favorite numbers are the charmingly romantic "I Didn't Know What Time It Was" and the admirably critical "I Like to Recognize the Tune," but all of the pieces are attractive. I should say a word or two on behalf of the comically wistful "Pottawatomie" and the somewhat sardonic song about New York, called with some bitterness, "Give It Back to the Indians." In fact, in both this heartfelt number and in the fine assault on the orchestras that elaborate on the songs they play, the excellent Mr. Lorenz Hart reveals himself to be as acute in social criticism as he is brilliant and inventive in rhyming. As for such matters as costuming, staging, dancing and setting, "Too Many Girls" is to be highly recommended. The first-act finale, incidentally, indicates the congruous influence on Mr. Abbott.

All the other virtues of the show would be unavailing if the casting were not satisfying. Happily it is especially good. Miss Marcy Wescott is, as usual, fresh, lovely and entirely entrancing as the heroine, giving the work a good head start to success right there. Then, too, the four college boys, who might have ruined the whole evening with fine whole-heartedness, are fortunately played by Mr. Kollmar, Mr. Bracken, Mr. Arnaz and that wonderful dancer, Hal LeRoy. One of the fine things of the new carnival is that it brings back young Mr. LeRoy after too long an absence. Miss Mary Jane Walsh is of considerable help as a college soubrette and in most cases the minor roles are well managed. But, although I do admire this new young Cuban, Mr. Arnaz, I am afraid I cannot be equally hearty about his partner, Miss Diosa Costello. Apparently Miss Costello was scared at a very early age by Lupe Velez, with dire results. Anyway, she is a lively girl. "Too Many Girls" will not make me forget "The Boys From Syracuse" but it is a swell musical show.

# "Ladies and Gentlemen"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, October 18, 1939

## 'Ladies and Gentlemen,' with Helen Hayes, Opens at the Martin Beck

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

MISS HELEN HAYES, after several years of high devotion to queenly roles, returned to New York last evening in a comfortable, affecting little play and in a part she could master with one hand tied behind her. The play, which opened at the Martin Beck, is "Ladies and Gentlemen," a romantic comedy which Charles MacArthur and Ben Hecht have built on a dramatic scaffolding run-up by L. Bush-Fekete. Miss Hayes is the chief of the ladies. Of course, she acts with great perception and delicacy.

She is a modern young woman, now, with a modern young woman's problems. The problems are somewhat complicated by the circumstances. She is wooed and won, and renounces, while a member of a murder trial jury, and still finds time to swing the jury to acquittal. The man on trial, you see, had also loved and left his wife for love, but Terry Scott did not think that he had also killed her. After Miss Scott had worked on them for a few weeks, neither did the other jurors.

Mr. MacArthur and Mr. Hecht have built this up. They have packed the jury with a fine collection of characters—comic and human, opinionated and sanctimonious and flatly ridiculous. There is a practical joker in the crowd, and a man who suspects his wife and is entertainingly distracted as he hears reports of the detectives who are

watching her. There is a rock-ribbed moralist, who wants to hang the defendant for immorality. And there is a cushioned club woman who speaks for 20,000 of California's lecture-conscious ladies. There is an undertaker who ghoulishly considers the defendant as a promising customer and there is a perennial college boy who makes passes at Terry.

And there is also the handsome, middle-aged architect who falls in love with her and would leave his wife and family for her. Philip Merivale has that part and he and Miss Hayes together lift many of the scenes above the pleasant, unexciting level of the rest of the play. Their love is so honest, indeed, and their parting in the final scene

### 'LADIES AND GENTLEMEN'

A comedy in two acts by Charles MacArthur and Ben Hecht, from a drama by L. Bush-Fekete; staged by Mr. MacArthur, assisted by Lewis Allen; settings by Boris Aronson; presented at the Martin Beck Theater on October 17, 1939, by Gilbert Miller. The cast: A Bailiff.....Harry Antrim  
Purdey.....Frank Conlan  
Van Duren.....James Seeley  
Pettijohn.....George Watts  
Hers.....Martin Wolfson  
The Sheriff.....William Lynn  
Patullo.....Pat Harrington  
Butterworth.....Joseph Sweeney  
Ward.....Roy Roberts  
Reynolds.....Robert Keith  
Court Room Matron.....Edna West  
Mrs. Bradford.....Evelyn Varden  
Mrs. Moore.....Jacqueline Paige  
Miss Scott.....Helen Hayes  
Mrs. Rudd.....Connie Gilchrist  
Campbell.....Philip Merivale  
Hutchinson.....Donald Mackenzie  
Bus Driver.....Guy Monypenny

so affecting, that the moralist is won over to a more tolerant view of life and votes for acquittal.

It is not a particularly eventful play, but it is an engaging one. The cast, and notably Miss Hayes and Mr. Merivale, probably are to be chiefly credited with making it so. It is not a demanding role for Miss Hayes; one can even imagine several other actresses quite good in it. But it is hard to think of any who could give it so much body, make it feel so real, lift it so far above routine. Mr. Merivale is grave and sure in his playing, and gives the part sincerity. Evelyn Varden, William Lynn, Joseph Sweeney and Robert Keith also ornament a cast which is, possibly, just a wee bit better than "Ladies and Gentlemen" deserves.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, October 18, 1939

## Imperial Miss Hayes Bows in Melodrama

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

IT IS less majesty to hint that Helen Hayes is anything less than imperial in any of her undertakings, but after witnessing last night's opening performance of "Ladies and Gentlemen," a play derived from the Hungarian of Bus-Fekete and hammered into the American scene by Charles MacArthur and Ben Hecht, I must plead guilty to treason. Not even Miss Hayes' great talents can make this play seem anything more than second-rate melodrama.

"Ladies and Gentlemen" purports to be a behind-the-scenes picture of a murder trial and to show the leavening effect of a woman's intuition upon her 11 colleagues

on the jury. Miss Hayes, of course, is the 12th juror, and she wins freedom for the defendant through cajolery, flattery, guile and a dash of sex. It takes her six scenes and something more than three weeks to accomplish this worthy purpose, and the whole business, as presented on the stage of the Martin Beck Theater, is as tedious as a probate action in surrogate's court.

At no point, during these six scenes, does Miss Hayes arouse any passionate desire on the part of her audience to see her cause triumph. At no point does it seem to matter, particularly whether the unseen defendant

goes free or swings. It is all cold, dispassionate, and hence tedious.

This is very disappointing, first because the theme appears to be one that could be made a fascinating study in the hands of such capable writers as Mr. MacArthur and Mr. Hecht; second, because one could suppose that even with an inferior script Miss Hayes might salvage a few scenes. But nothing of the sort happens.

There is one moment when it seems that

the play is about to become alive, and that is the first scene of the second act. The jurors have been taken to a California mountain top for a brief respite from duty and, incidentally, to view the scene of the crime. At this point, Miss Hayes and her co-star, Philip Merivale, are permitted to reveal their growing love for each other. Both of them rise to this opportunity and for a brief while we of the audience sit on the edges of our chairs in anticipation of tremendous events. But the tremendous events never occur, and the play sinks back into stagnancy from which it never again emerges.

Gilbert Miller, who presents this surprisingly dull work, has done his best by production in the matter of cast and settings, which are the work of Boris Aronson. In addition to Miss Hayes and Mr. Merivale, he has given us Evelyn Varden, whose accomplishments as a stage matron are magnificent. He has engaged William Lynn for a comedy part (the sheriff) and Mr. Lynn does well with the flimsy material provided for him. He has given Pat Harrington, described as a fugitive from the Club 18, his first opportunity on the legitimate stage, and Mr. Harrington responds nobly. And there is Frank Conlan, whose performance as Mr. DePinna in "You Can't Take It With You" will never be forgotten, for further comedy.

But despite all this talent, and not forgetting the occasional bright shafts of enlivening humor that once in a while stir a ripple of laughter, the play remains static.

The acting, it need not be said is good and sincere, as it would be with such an honest company of players. But all their efforts come to nothing because none of them have anything interesting to say or to do. Sorry, but we have to submit a negative report on this one.

# "Ladies and Gentlemen"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, October 18, 1939

## "Ladies and Gentlemen" Brings Helen Hayes Back to Broadway

"Ladies and Gentlemen," comedy by Charles MacArthur and Ben Hecht, from an original by L. Bush-Fekete. Produced by Gilbert Miller at the Martin Beck theatre, New York, Oct. 17, 1939.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THERE is, I find, one advantage in seeing a play during its tryout period out of town. It cushions the first shock. When I saw Helen Hayes and her company play "Ladies and Gentlemen" in Philadelphia a month ago my thought was that only the popularity of Miss Hayes could save it.

Last night, at the Martin Beck theatre, seeing this Charles MacArthur-Ben Hecht comedy a second time, I find myself still largely of the same mind. But the authors have done so much to pull the play together and Miss Hayes and Philip Merivale have done so much to rationalize their stage romance, that I found it pretty good entertainment, and quite to the liking of a susceptible audience.

Of course the fact cannot be blinked that any artificial stage piece of this type is not worthy the talents of this fine little actress, who has grown so amazingly in poise and whose art has matured so beautifully the last six or eight seasons.

### A Wife's Prerogative

But if she elects to give a season to a comedy of her husband's contrivance, either because she likes her husband or because she really likes the comedy, or both, that, I contend, is her privilege and her right.

And if she, by her graciousness and her nice feeling for the more human emotions, can take such a comedy and hold it together as something a little more important than the average commercial venture in the theatre, then she is entitled to the credit and the business that she and the play may attract. Which explains the three-star rating at the head of this column.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," as you may recall, is the story of a stubborn lady juror who, believing the defendant innocent of murdering his wife that he might marry his secretary, holds out against those members of the jury who are of contrary mind.

### Loyal Heroine

She is, she explains, secretary to a motion picture producer and has had an opportunity to experience life and estimate character pretty thoroughly. The defendant on trial is a writer. A beautiful writer. And no beautiful writer could possibly condone, to say nothing of commit, dastardly crimes.

The appeal of "Ladies and Gentlemen," however, does not lie either in its drama or its romance. It is a comedy of sprightly dialogue and good character observation.

Some of the lines are a little rough, in the Hollywood manner. Some of them, I suspect, are going to startle Hayes fans into protest. But they had last night's audience laughing heartily. Which is excuse enough to satisfy authors and producers.

### Helen's Secretary

Miss Hayes may suggest a Hollywood secretary to some. She doesn't to me. But she does suggest a very pleasant and alertly minded young woman who came suddenly upon a dream romance in a jury room and thought to make the most of it. She plays with becoming reticence and good conviction.

Mr. Merivale is edging over the line of mature romance, but is still a master of the sort of sincerity that makes belated romance attractive to the ladies.

Robert Keith serves competently as the chief jury opposition, Evelyn Varden and Connie Gilchrist emphasize the comedy of lady juror types, and there are splendid character bits by William Lynn, George Watts, and Joseph Sweeney.

Servicable settings by Boris Aronson, and capable direction by Mr. MacArthur and Lewis Allen.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, October 18, 1939

## Jury Duty

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

MISS HAYES, the finest actress of them all, doffs the royal raiment of England to examine the Los Angeles jury system in the new Hecht and MacArthur play, "Ladies and Gentlemen." In a role that must amount to a quiet vacation for her, she is just as brilliant as ever, playing with that air of human warmth and gracious femininity in which she surpasses all of her potential competitors to the title of First Lady of the American Theater. It is her completely winning portrayal of a sympathetic and lovelorn jury woman that gives "Ladies and Gentlemen" its chief claim upon your interest and attendance. For, to tell you the truth, the eminent Messrs. Hecht and MacArthur haven't provided her with the assistance that she deserves. Their vehicle for their star is a slow-paced and uneventful tale of jurymen at work and play that hesitates uncertainly between satire and romance and then wanders off into the amiable paths of modest sentimentality. Despite one or two entertaining scenes the new work is surprisingly routine playwriting to come from the hands of such eminent gentlemen.

Perhaps there is something to that rumor that Hollywood has been bad for Hecht and MacArthur. Maybe most of the trouble can be charged to the Hungarian gentleman named Bush-Fekete who is said to be responsible for the original play. Anyway, "Ladies and Gentlemen" is all about the joys and sorrows of the jury trying a scenario writer named Craig for the murder of his wife. Miss Hayes, secretary to a big-shot Hollywood film magnate, doesn't think the defendant is guilty. Philip Merivale and Robert

Keith do. The others really don't matter, since they are chiefly comics and character people of one kind or another. I don't suppose it will surprise you any more than it did me to discover that the hero and heroine of this romantic fable fall in love and proceed to parallel the unfortunate love affair between the defendant and his sweetheart to a close enough extent to convince Mr. Merivale and eventually even the stubborn Mr. Keith that the man on trial is innocent. It might interest you to know that Mrs. Roosevelt is responsible for changing the vote of one of the women jurors from guilty to innocent.

In the second act the play, which has been moving unsteadily about between a hotel sitting room, a hotel bedroom, a hotel balcony and a mountain top, reaches the jury room and finally gets started. These later scenes do possess considerable dramatic interest in a regulation fashion and

they permit Miss Hayes to do some of her finest and most persuasive acting, but they are far too long in arriving. For one thing, the action is too slowly paced and generally lethargic for comfort. For another, the author apparently had a lot of trouble making up their minds as to what they were about. At first they seem bent on lampooning the jury system. For a time there is a touch of Hollywood satire. Then the play almost decides to be a farcical treatment of the methods jurors, both male and female, use to win each other to their side of the case. Once romance has reared its pretty head, however, most of the other moods are forgotten, and I must say that "Ladies and Gentlemen" is at its best when it is being unashamedly romantic. Thanks not only to Miss Hayes's incomparable playing but also to the excellent work of Mr. Merivale, the more sentimental episodes do take on a vestige of life.

Despite moments of dramatic interest, it would all be very commonplace and unthrilling stuff were it not for the presence of Miss Hayes. Whether putting boorish or amorous jurors in their place, squelching a haughty jurymist, talking of her dreams and hopes to the tired, aging architect who is learning to love her, reading and acting out bits of trial testimony or sending her married lover from her, she is radiant and charming, giving distinction and value to the most routine of scenes. It is a beautiful performance in a play not worthy of it. Mr. Merivale is, as I have said, at his admirably best in the role opposite Miss Hayes, and there is good work by Mr. Keith, as the most stubborn of the jurors and by Roy Roberts, Miss Evelyn Varden, Miss Connie Gilchrist and my old namesake George Watts, as other members of the jury. William Lynn is helpful as the sheriff and I resent the fact that such a splendid actor as Joseph Sweeney is not seen more to do. What he does is, of course, first-rate. I cannot say as much for "Ladies and Gentlemen," although the true theatergoer wouldn't think of missing Miss Hayes in any of her vehicles.



# "Ladies and Gentlemen"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, October 18, 1939

## Helen Hayes Seen in "Ladies and Gentlemen"

Mr. Merivale and Many Good Actors Appear in an  
Indifferent Play

By JOHN MASON BROWN

APPARENTLY some of us think more of Helen Hayes' standing as an actress than does either Charles MacArthur, her husband, or Gilbert Miller, her usually astute manager. If we had had our way last night we would not have permitted her to step down from Victoria's throne to appear—even as a charming wifely gesture, charmingly executed—in such a signally minor comedy as the somewhat cheesy little number called "Ladies and Gentlemen" which Mr. MacArthur and Ben Hecht have based upon a script by Hungary's Bush-Fekete.

Miss Hayes has gone far since she brought her bright and beguiling earnestness to such flapper parts as she played in "Bab" and "Penrod." She showed the magic that was hers in "Dear Brutus." She may have muffed Mr. Shaw's kittenish Cleopatra but in "What Every Woman Knows" she came into everybody's own. "Coquette" was for her a conquest of new kingdoms. Since then as two queens as unlike as "The Casket Letters" and "Leaves From the Journal of Our Life in the Highlands" she has in "Mary of Scotland" and, even more particularly, in

"Victoria Regina" turned playgoers into loyal subjects everywhere.

She has taken her vacations in between times in such workaday scripts as "Petticoat Influence" and "The Good Fairy." But both on the stage and screen she has won for herself a position so important that last night it was impossible not to feel as if, for family reasons, Miss Hayes had consented to appear in some drama by the Hattens, Samuel Shipman, or Dan Goldberg.

### Wasting a Monarch's Time

Excellent as her performance is; irresistible as she is herself; uncannily skillful as she is as an actress, her appearance in such a play is bound to seem not so much a performance as a temporary abdication. Undoubtedly Miss Hayes, who is one of the crowned heads of our theatre, is only playing at having hidden her ermine as Marie Antoinette played at being a milkmaid. But to sober historians the result is no less disturbing. A queen should know better. After all, there is such a thing as rank. And State affairs should demand a monarch's time.

Although Mr. Miller has cast "Ladies and Gentlemen" admirably, although Mr. Aronson has set it well, and although such likeable performers as Philip Merivale, William Lynn, Robert Keith, Joseph Sweeney, Frank Conlan, the ever-contributive Evelyn Varden, and the truly brilliant Connie Gilchrist (do you remember her hard-boiled passenger in "Excursion"?) are on hand to play, and play well, the members of the jury, some of us as jurors out front had no other choice than to hold out for a "Guilty" verdict.

Mr. MacArthur's and Mr. Hecht's drama about a Hollywood secretary (Miss Hayes), who finally gives up the married foreman (Mr. Merivale) with whom she has fallen in love while winning an acquittal for a husband accused of murder, is not terrible, or anything like that. It is simply so negligible, so aggressively indifferent, so sappy in its sentimentality, so effortful in its comedy, and so old-fashioned throughout that it is hard to believe Miss Hayes ever wanted to be in it.

She brings it so much more than it deserves that sitting before her is, as always, a pleasure. Yet even while one watches her with admiration it is difficult to take one's mind off the throne she has vacated for the moment in order to be on hand at all. The Miss Hayes we all venerate and believe in is so much more important than the comedy she has chosen to adorn that this comedy's shortcomings cannot help seeming doubly conspicuous in spite of all the virtues of the performance. One looks for a red carpet and finds only a grassless path.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, October 18, 1939

## Helen Hayes and Philip Merivale in 'Ladies and Gentlemen,' by MacArthur and Hecht

By BROOKS ATKINSON

HELEN HAYES has been occupying thrones for so long that it is pleasant to receive her back among the commoners. That is the only plausible reason for her appearance with Philip Merivale in "Ladies and Gentlemen," which opened on Mr. Beck's midtown estate last evening. It is a little number that Charles MacArthur and Ben Hecht have run up from a pattern by Ladislaus Bush-Fekete, the Hungarian hack who was last seen insisting that "The Lady Has a Heart." It is not much of a play from any classical standards, although the boys from Nyack have put some good barroom jokes into it. But even a sloppy play cannot extinguish the graciousness and charm of Miss Hayes's presence in the company of Mr. Merivale, who represents the same qualities in the theatre. Let "Ladies and Gentlemen" pass as a testament to the simple loveliness of the first lady of the stage, who is fed up on royalty for the present. She is altogether winning.

Not that any one ever thought she had royal ambitions. Even as Mary of Scotland or Victoria of England she was a human being first. Now she is the efficient stenographer of a Hollywood madman, and she is serving on the jury at a murder trial. Among a lot of case-hardened vigilantes she represents

the good-will of a normal person, free from cynicism and revenge. Although the part is hardly developed, Miss Hayes steps through it with the daintiness of a woman of character, finding in herself a glow that is wanting in the play and lightly adorning the speeches. No automaton, she acts these scraps of a part with genuine feeling, and you must believe everything she says and does. And perhaps this inconsequential secretary is more of a triumph than the queens she has been playing. For with nothing much to go on except her skill as an actress and her fineness as a person, she captures the heart of the

audience. Mr. MacArthur ought to say "Thanks!" to his wife.

Although a murder trial is going on somewhere in the background, "Ladies and Gentlemen" does spare us the court-room scene. Less crime play than reverie about human nature, it confines its remarks to the hotel where the jury is staying, a mountain cliff where the crime, if any, was committed and the juryroom where the fate of the defendant is decided. MacArthur and Hecht are interested in the personalities of the jurors. And the play is about the little girl from the studios who shakes the jury out of its prejudices by guile and native decency. Since this is not quite enough for a play in America of the Twentieth Century, the boys from Nyack fill it up with gags. They are excellent gags in the vernacular—sentimental about people of rude breeding and scornful of people with upper-class pretensions. If "Ladies and Gentlemen" was Hungarian in its infancy, it is Broadway and Hollywood now.

To Miss Hayes's modern Juliet Mr. Merivale plays a middle-aged Romeo with the good taste that distinguishes his acting. With very little help from the authors he contrives to make this love at vesper time plausible on a high moral plane. Mr. MacArthur's roughness extends also to the casting and direction. When he is not serious, as in the case of Robert Keith, he is sardonic, as in the case of Evelyn Varden and Joseph Sweeney, or low comedy, as in the cases of George Watts and William Lynn. It is a colorful cast of assorted actors and Boris Aronson has blessed the occasion with some of the most alluring sets of the year. But it is Miss Hayes who blesses the audience as well as the drama. Every one is in love with our Helen. She is not only an actress but a good sport.

# "The Man Who Came to Dinner"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, October 17, 1939

## "The Man Who Came to Dinner"

### Rocks Music Box With Laughter

"The Man Who Came to Dinner," comedy by Moss Hart and George Kaufman. Produced by Sam Harris at the Music Box, New York, Oct. 16, 1939.

★ ★ ★  
By BURNS MANTLE

THE Messrs. Moss Hart and George Kaufman need not have to worry much about "The Man Who Came to Dinner," which arrived at the Music Box last night.

It is, for all the stress that has been laid upon its being a friendly libel of Alexander Woolcott, his eccentricities, his wit, his temperamental explosions and such atrocious manners as he is reported to indulge on occasion for the entertainment of his social stogees, a good comedy for any audience.

Last night, of course, it had its own picked and perfect crowd. All the Woolcott friends were there, and all the friends of the authors as well. It is a group that overlaps pretty generously, so there was a good deal of the "How're you, darling?" "It's nice to see you, darling," sort of greeting.

But the laughter that rocked the Music Box did not come exclusively from this crowd. Nor was it inspired by friendliness. It came from normally happy playgoers who like their fun touched with a certain sophistication and edged with those boldnesses in speech that startle without offense.

The situation of a faring ego-maniac who slips on a bit of ice on the doorstep of a toadying society climber the night he is invited to dinner, and is marooned in the lady's

house for six weeks, is a solid foundation for natural comedy.

The Messrs. Hart and Kaufman exaggerate the possibilities somewhat, though much less, I think, than they did with their riot of two seasons ago, "You Can't Take It With You." Yet they get much the same audience response.

#### Good Fun

This is especially true of the early scenes, when the introduction of the impossible Sheridan Whiteside, as he takes charge of his host's home, frightening the family into submission by his threat of a suit for enor-

mous damages because they left the ice on their doorstep, is a succession of howls. Later there is a touch of sentiment to hold the story together and a skillful contriving of situations that bring such entertaining personalities into the picture as John Hoyer, dashing off a gentle imitation of Noel Coward, and Carol Goodner to play a charmer of men and a foil for Whiteside's sexy compliments.

The second act is lively comedy, with a broadcasting satire at its curtain that is fairly riotous. The third act has been rewritten to its improvement since I was a previewer of the play in Hartford two weeks ago. And the concluding curtain, though it is crowded a bit by a previous scene with a mummy case, is still one of the best laughs of the evening.

#### Good Cast

The playing is authoritative and nicely directed by Mr. Kaufman. There is a good deal of movement without the action becoming confused, which is important in comedy. Monty Woolley is an excellent choice for the Whiteside part. He suggests both the character and the class of the popular lecturer and wit.

Edith Atwater plays the cynical secretary with fine scorn and Ruth Vivian is perfectly cast as a lightly unbalanced elater who fits in with the Woolcottian passion for colorful eccentrics who can make an art of murder.

Theodore Newton is the sturdy juvenile and there are short parts nicely realized by Mrs. Priestley Morrison, Dudley Clements, LeRoy Opert, David Burns, Edmonia Nolley and George Lessey. The Oenslager setting is attractive.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, October 17, 1939

## Man Who Came to Dinner Will Stay a Long Time

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THE Man Who Came to Dinner will remain longer than I dare to predict, for the fabulous George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart once more have drawn from the bottomless wellspring of their wit the most sparkling and intoxicating dramatic concoction since You Can't Take It With You.

The new caricature of life, a vast and gusty lampoon, clever and vindictive, blithe and malicious, has no plot to speak of save that a man is thrust by accident into the home of certain unwilling hosts in Massillon, Ohio, and that he makes himself thoroughly obnoxious to everybody within shouting range.

But upon this slender foundation Kaufman and Hart have reared another madhouse. Sober analysis (if such a thing were possible in connection with the new play at the Music Box) could easily tear to pieces this crazy theatrical structure, but by the time the last curtain falls — and long before — there are no sober analysts left in the audience. They are dazed, hypnotized and almost suffocated in their own laughter.

According to the cognoscenti, the man who came to dinner is roughly—very roughly—fashioned after a distinguished litterateur, radio raconteur, erstwhile drama critic, collector of celebrities and connoisseur de cuisine. In the next breath, but separated from the previous statement for reasons having to do with the laws of libel, it is said on good authority that Mr. Alexander Woolcott was importuned to play the role.

Be that as it may, Kaufman and Hart, with the good offices of Sam Harris who provided

an exceptionally good cast, give us as the central figure of their play a modern literary Falstaff, roundly proportioned and full of what we call temperament when applied to genius, and dirty disposition when applied to ordinary mortals. He is a man who seethes with epigrammatic brilliance at one moment and with fiendish violence at the next, who is sentimental as a crooner and as cynical as a female playwright, as syrupy as a cream-of-mush radio announcer and as truculent as a Hitler.

The character of Sheridan Whiteside fairly explodes upon the stage at the moment of his entrance, shortly after he has injured his hip by falling on the steps of the home of Mr. and Mrs. Stanley, "in a small town in Ohio." Thereafter, in a course strewn with invective and satire and punctuated by general insults, he takes over the house like

an army of occupation, infesting it with secretaries, actresses, actors, radio engineers and cockroach colonies. He incites the son and daughter of the house to run away. He threatens to sue his unfortunate host for \$250,000. He drives his nurse to abandon her profession and enter a munitions factory so that the human race may be destroyed rather than saved. He attempts, for his own selfish purposes, to smash the romance of his girl secretary and the small town newspaper man with whom she has fallen in love. And only in that does he meet his Waterloo.

All this is accomplished on the stage with all the ingenious lunacies the Messrs. Kaufman and Hart are capable of devising, and its farce still remains plausible. It is gross caricature, to be sure, but like all caricatures, it merely emphasizes human absurdity. There is a delightful moment, for instance, when that excellent farceur, John Hoyer, is introduced upon the stage for little practical purpose than to deliver a devastating lampoon of Noel Coward; and another when David Burns seems to give us a composite picture of all the Marx Brothers rolled into one character. And there is a howling second-act curtain wherein, after Whiteside has completed his work of malevolent destruction, he begins his tender Christmas Eve broadcast to the accompaniment of six white-robed choir boys singing Holy Night.

The riotous satire is given a pungent, sharp and witty performance by Monty Woolley. There is a glimmer in his eye and venom on his tongue. And when you consider that three-fourths of his lines are delivered from a wheel chair, and yet his work is never static, you realize that this is one of the truly great comic performances of our times.

The entire cast, in fact, is in keeping with the tone of the play. Edith Atwater, as the Great Man's secretary, is beautifully cast and responds to every opportunity. Carol Goodner, returning from England, brings great talent home to Broadway again. Theodore Newton is altogether in the spirit of the baroque, and David Burns makes his brief third-act appearance something to be remembered.

All in all, Broadway is safe for another year.

# "The Man Who Came to Dinner"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, October 17, 1939

## 'The Man Who Came to Dinner' Opens at the Music Box

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

MOSS HART and George S. Kaufman, the unregenerate, are no respecters of persons, Alexander Woolcott or the limitations of the human diaphragm. They will sacrifice all these, putting the last under almost intolerable strain, if they can only puncture the air with jests. The air around the Music Box was riddled last evening, as "The Man Who Came to Dinner" arrived there.

It is an excruciating compendium of scurrility, and nobody can politely pretend that Mr. Woolcott is not the chief butt of it, a fact about which Mr. W. can afford to be jovial. The authors have wrapped all the legends about him into one package, and named the package Sheridan Whiteside, but they chastise with admiration. And they have made him the unchallenged hero of a joltingly funny play.

Their Mr. Whiteside is marooned in Ohio at Christmas time, halted by an injured hip as he darts from lecture platform to Hollywood, closely pursued by radio technicians and telephone calls from Europe. He has been inveigled to dinner by Mr. and Mrs. Stanley, and when he falls in front of their house and has to stay for weeks they are at first filled with happy anticipation. But they reckon without Mr. Whiteside—without his ingenious insults, his incredible effrontery, his abashing sentimentality and the deviousness of his stratagems. They also reckon without his friends, which include gentlemen who bear surprising, but no doubt superficial, resemblance to Noel Coward and Harpo Marx.

I cannot begin to tell you all that happens, after a slightly static opening scene in which Mr. Whiteside spouts engaging but scurrilous insults from the safety of a wheel chair. I would not if I could, for this farce and surprise is to be cherished. Mr. Whiteside's

pretty secretary falls in love with the town's newspaper man, of course. And Mr. Whiteside tries to break it up, of course. He imports the perilous Lorraine as a counter-irritant; is outwitted and outwits in turn. But the odd fate which he and Banjo—now really, Mr. Kaufman and Mr. Hart—cook up for Lorraine when they decide to set things right you must be left to discover on your own.

The humor is, of course, largely the humor of insult, and a good deal of it is of the knock-down-and-drag-out variety. But satire runs along with buffoonery. Mr. Whiteside's Christmas Eve broadcast is a thing of joy and he is delightfully ghoulish in his pursuit of old murderers. A nice twist comes out of that last, incidentally, and helps set matters right. Outrageous things are said and done by "The Man Who Came to Dinner" and his associates, but it is all in good, rough sport and if Mr. Woolcott can take it so can you. It's all great fun, and faster and funnier as it goes along.

Monty Woolley has the title role and performs it grandly and is wise enough, not to attempt too much parody. Edith Atwater,

### THE MAN WHO CAME TO DINNER

A comedy in three acts by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman; setting by Donald Oenslager; directed by Mr. Kaufman; presented on October 16, 1939, at The Music Box by Sam H. Harris. The cast:

|                        |                         |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Mrs. Ernest W. Stanley | Virginia Hammond        |
| Miss Preen             | Mary Wickes             |
| Richard Stanley        | Gordon Merrick          |
| June Stanley           | Barbara Woodsell        |
| John                   | George Probert          |
| Sarah                  | Mrs. Priestley Morrison |
| Mrs. Dexter            | Barbara Adams           |
| Mrs. McCutcheon        | Edmonia Nolley          |
| Mr. Stanley            | George Lessey           |
| Maggie Cutler          | Edith Atwater           |
| Dr. Bradley            | Dudley Clements         |
| Sheridan Whiteside     | Monty Woolley           |
| Harriet Stanley        | Ruth Vivian             |
| Bert Jefferson         | Theodore Newton         |
| Prof. Meta             | LeRoi Operti            |
| Luncheon Guests        | Charles Washington      |
| Mr. Baker              | William Postance        |
| Expressman             | Carl Johnson            |
| Lorraine Sheldon       | Harold Woolf            |
| Sandy                  | Carol Goodner           |
| Beverly Carlton        | Michael Harvey          |
| Westcott               | John Hoyeradt           |
| Radio Technicians      | Edward Fisher           |
|                        | Rodney Stewart          |
|                        | Jack Whitman            |
| Six Young Boys         | Daniel Landon           |
|                        | Donald Landon           |
|                        | Phil Sheridan           |
| Banjo                  | Robert Rea              |
| Two Deputies           | David Burns             |
|                        | Curtis Karpe            |
| A Plainclothesman      | William Postance        |

John Hoyeradt, Carol Goodner, Mary Wickes, Mrs. Priestley Morrison, Theodore Newton and a dozen others play with skill and relish, and Mr. Kaufman has directed it with cunning hand. But if I were either Mr. Hart or Mr. Kaufman I'd keep a sharp eye on Mr. Woolcott. That whirling noise you hear is Mr. Woolcott sharpening some phrases of his own.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, October 17, 1939

## Visiting Ogre

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THE comedy of insult reaches a high peak of merriment in the new Kaufman and Hart play called "The Man Who Came to Dinner." On the surface, that particular type of humorous writing seems to present a simple pattern. All that is necessary is for the central character to insult everyone else in the cast for two acts, and then in the third to have all of them turn around and insult him. It really isn't as easy as that, though. The danger is that the humor may become monotonous and the central character unbearable. The Messrs. Kaufman and Hart deserve all the more credit, therefore, for making their comedy genuinely hilarious, since they certainly do not fail to make their hero odious. Wisely they have permitted the invective heaped upon the shoulders of their Sheridan Whiteside to be savage enough to satisfy any audience, and they have let the fun die down but rarely. "The Man Who Came to Dinner" is merely an acid portrait of one of the authors' pals, and it is as filled with laughter as any play we are likely to see this year. Chalk up a new hit for the oncoming new season.

According to the proud confession of the authors, their hero and victim is the eminent Mr. Alexander Woolcott, who can also dish it out. Since Mr. Woolcott, who is said to be sometimes sensitive as to what is written about him, doesn't seem to mind in this particular case, then there is no reason why we should. After all, it is probably pretty flattering to have George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart write a full-length play about you, even if the portrait is fairly savage upon occasion. Anyway, Sheridan Whiteside,

who may or may not possess certain of the qualities of Mr. Woolcott, is given credit for resources, a neat if nasty wit, a sugary prose style, a gargantuan selfishness, a lot of distinguished friends, a vast radio audience and, of all things, a beard. What the authors seem to be saying of their pal is that he is a swell fellow and all that and they love him, but in his modest way he is rather a rat. To demonstrate such a flattering thesis, they show him to you when he is taking over for the duration of his rounds the home of some people at whose threshold he had fallen and smashed himself, though not to bits.

Mr. Whiteside is not to be moved for six weeks, and so he stays there in the living room of poor Mr. and Mrs. Stanley, insulting the household, receiving such friends as Noel Coward, Harpo Marx and a certain stage star who had better be nameless here: growing alternately petulant and bullying, and almost making a mess of the life of his faith-

ful girl secretary. Although the plot includes such an active incident as the removal of the trouble-making actress in the mummy case, there isn't a great deal of story in "The Man Who Came to Dinner," and it isn't needed. For here, the Kaufman-Hart wit, ingenuity and gift for observing their friends sardonically are working admirably, and the result is that the play is decidedly funnier, if far less likable than "You Can't Take It With You." In truth, I think I should have to go back to the same gentleman's "Once in a Lifetime" for its equal in festivity. Despite lagging moments here and there, it is almost consistently good, smart, brittle, fun.

As in all of the plays with which Mr. Kaufman is concerned, the casting is excellent. There had been some talk that Mr. Woolcott was going to display his capacity for martyrdom by playing the leading role himself. I am glad that he resisted the temptation, for surely it is much better for us all to have the expert Monty Woolley, the reformed Yale professor, in the all-important part. Looking more like the late Edward VII than ever, the hirsute Mr. Woolley performs with fine relish, making Sheridan Whiteside a complete monster but keeping him strangely bearable. The lesser characters are invariably well played, but I think there should be a particular word for the straightforward charm and intelligence with which Edith Atwater invests the long-suffering secretary.

Miss Carol Goodner is admirable, too, as the predatory lady who is spirited off in the mummy case, and there is good work by John Hoyeradt as Mr. Coward, David Burns as a character thinly disguised as Banjo, Theodore Newton as a reporter and Miss Mary Wickes as a nurse who turns on her oppressor. A mysterious lady is amusingly impersonated by Miss Ruth Vivian. Incidentally, a brilliant parody of a Noel Coward song enlivens the proceedings at one point. "The Man Who Came to Dinner" comes under the head of a smash hit.



# "The Man Who Came to Dinner"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, October 17, 1939

## "The Man Who Came To Dinner" Produced

Mr. Woolley in Mr. Hart's and Mr. Kaufman's Hilarious Comedy

By JOHN MASON BROWN

THAT Alexander Woolcott is the author, lecturer, critic, and radio performer Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman drew upon for their central character in "The Man Who Came to Dinner" is about as much a state secret as that Franklin Delano Roosevelt is the person people have in mind just now when they speak of the President of the United States. Yet there is another truth we hold to be self-evident. That is, the Messrs. Hart and Kaufman have been uncommonly fortunate in their choice of a hero.

If, at the Music Box, Sheridan Whiteside sounds and behaves suspiciously like Dr. Woolcott, this in itself, is a guarantee of excellent talk and entertaining antics. For, as every one must know who can either turn a dial or read the language, the good doctor is one of the most colorful personalities of our day. In any of his roles—as arsenic or old lace, as fugleman or executioner, as murder addict or humorous raconteur, as drama critic or book trumpeter, as charity lover or prestige destroyer, as sentimentalist or "old meany"—he is a figure not in one million but in one hundred and thirty-three million.

Mr. Woolcott has had more than the inclination to be an individualist. He has had the gifts, too. All of us have long rejoiced in this knowledge. We have likewise known that Mr. Woolcott was also an actor because Mr. Behrman has twice persuaded the good doctor to lend his owlish person to the playing of Woolcottian rascals and couch-dwellers behind the footlights. Even so, it was not until last night that Messrs. Hart and Kaufman forced us to realize that in addition to being a personage, Mr. Woolcott was also a play. And what a play "The Man Who Came to Dinner" proves to be!

### A Delightful Evening

It is as gay, giddy, and delectable a comedy as our stage has seen in years. The sur-

est proof of its hilarity no less than its skill lies in the fact that it is a drama a cleft to which no key is really needed. The door is open wide on laughter the whole time, regardless of whether or not you can read Noel Coward into Beverly Carlton and Harpo Marx into "Banjo" or are intimately acquainted with the legends of Woolcottia.

Having a pass-key is always flattering, and one can be turned to undeniable advantage even in this unbolting door. But without such a pass-key, it is possible to enter into the joys of "The Man Who Came to Dinner." It is a self-contained piece of writing for all its sidelights on a special group. Indeed, its characters are developed with such witty persuasion that, unless he is very careful when next he goes on tour, Mr. Woolcott stands far more in danger of being accused of modeling himself on the play than he does of hearing that the play has been modeled on him.

What Mr. Hart and Mr. Kaufman have done is to imagine and develop all the complications which might arise if during one of his lecture trips such a figure as Mr. Woolcott were to slip on the ice, fall, and injure himself while having dinner with a small-town Ohio family, and be compelled thereafter to spend several weeks in the

household. With mustard gas oozing from his mouth in the form of speech, with his finger in every pie, with broadcasts to deliver, the family exiled upstairs, love affairs cropping up all around him, strange Christmas presents arriving by the score, and trans-Atlantic calls possible on the telephone beside him—what would such a legendary character do? Plenty. Of this you may be certain, especially after seeing Mr. Hart's and Mr. Kaufman's side-splitting imaginings which add up to form a kind of "Hellzapoppin'" of the literati and prove a joy throughout.

### Monty Woolley Excellent

Their comedy is a joy not only because in it the "Master" speaks as unmistakably as if his words were coming from a Victrola record. It is a joy because one knows that a master is speaking even if one should not happen to know who the actual "Master" is. The wit, the malice, the invention, the sentimentality, the gift for phrasing, the lush purr of his words give more than a unique clarity to the dialogue. They spill over into the action, directing its course and giving it a similar fleetness.

It should not be assumed that "The Man Who Came to Dinner" is a one-character play. It is anything but that. It includes some of the maddest as well as some of the best drawn of Mr. Hart's and Mr. Kaufman's eccentrics, and some of the most adroit of their developed scenes. It gains, however, because of its smooth-running, ever-helpful direction; because of Donald Oenslager's exceptionally contributive and distinguished setting, and the work of the actors.

Monty Woolley is so excellent as the visiting lecturer that, for once, Mr. Woolcott had better look to his laurels. Although he was naturally nervous at the outset last evening when attempting a performance as ambitious and so long, Mr. Woolley soon grew in confidence and bearded the lion in his own den. He was in turn suave, charming, astrigent, rude, and properly lacking in group consciousness. He did an heroic job with skill and infinite finesse.

Grateful mention must be made, too, of Mary Wickes' convulsing trained nurse, of Mrs. Priestley Morrison's humorous and yet touching maid, of Carol Goodner's ant-pestered actress, of Theodore Newton's ingratiating small-town journalist, of Edith Atwater's admirably played secretary, of David Burns' droll "Banjo," and, of course, of John Haysradt's sharply etched young British playwright who sings a parody of Noel Coward songs which is as uproarious as it is devastating.

All in all, the evening is a genuinely superior one; the kind of evening which justifies one's faith in commercial Broadway because it finds it at its topnotch best.

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## Moss Hart, George S. Kaufman Discuss "The Man Who Came to Dinner"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

WHETHER or not it is the funniest comedy Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman have written is probably a matter of opinion. But it is a fact that "The Man Who Came to Dinner," which opened at the Music Box last evening, is the funniest comedy of this season, and is likely to remain so long after the competition has grown stiffer. Taking Alexander Woolcott in one hand, which is no mean feat, and the disorderly style of "You Can't Take It With You" in the other, Mr. Hart and Mr. Kaufman have put together a fantastic piece of nonsense, with enough plot to serve and a succession of witty rejoinders to keep it hilarious.

Since Father Christmas hesitates about playing the part himself, the saturnine Monty Woolley is presiding over the comedy with wonderful aplomb and his own whiskers. Every one seemed thoroughly delighted in Times Square last evening.

Although the story is imaginary, the characterization is a chip off the old Woolcott block. As the authors tell it, a fabulous lecturer, coming unwillingly to dinner in an Ohio town, slips on the ice, fractures something or other and has to stay as an invalid

on the premises. He is down but not exactly out. For he despotically takes over the house from the indignant hosts and turns it into an asylum for his friends, his satellites and his querulous intrigue. The principal intrigue concerns an attempt to forestall his secretary's plan to marry. But that is no more than a clothesline on which this vaudeville is pinned and left hanging in the breeze.

No one would say that this is a portrait done in the oil of affection. Neither is it

etched in acid. It is done out of relish for the bountiful mischief and the sharp tongue of the nation's town crier. For a rounded portrait something would have to be done for the good works that Woolcott squanders lavishly as his old juggernaut goes rolling across the country, knocking down defenseless bores and jostling the celebrities. But this chronicle of a radio publicist, turning testily on his nurse, bombing his startled doctor, match-making and match-unmaking, plotting deviously and always talking with brilliant sardonic wit, is one that theatre-goers are going to relish as much as Mr. Hart and Mr. Kaufman have, and probably Woolcott will also cherish it as one of the fabulous jokes in his Dickensian career.

Having a sense of humor of his own, Mr. Woolley plays the part in the grand manner with dignity and knavery. Among other things, it is a literary part, and the Woolley as well as the Woolcott knows how to speak lines. Under Mr. Kaufman's direction, the comedy goes rollicking across the stage in the wake of some excellent actors. Edith Atwater plays the part of the spirited secretary with a sincerity that gives the comedy a genuine feeling. Carol Goodner is vastly amusing as a terminant actress. John Haysradt is excellent in a Noel Coward bit, and David Burns does something amusing with a Harpo Marx item in spite of Harpo's presence in the audience last evening.

Inside a single setting by Donald Oenslager, the comedy has been pulled faultily together into an evening of satirical merry-making. It is American in its comic tone, Broadway in craftsmanship, and a roaring evening of literate hilarity into the bargain.

# "Skylark"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, October 12, 1939

## 'Skylark,' With Gertrude Lawrence, Opens at the Morosco Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

MISS GERTRUDE LAWRENCE is an actress of carefree skill and the poised ardency of her playing is always a delight. Few can with a more dancing step lead a playwright through the confusion of his thoughts, clutching his inky hand and reassuring him that everything is going to be all right in spite of everything. She is now extending such guidance to Samson Raphaelson, in whose "Skylark" she appeared last evening.

Mr. Raphaelson has got himself badly tangled in a minor marital anecdote and needs all the help that Miss Lawrence, Donald Cook, Glenn Anders and the rest can give him. They brighten passages for him, and animate his characters. And if actors could give direction and point to a play which lacks both they would surely have done it. Nobody could ask more of actors than these give to "Skylark."

It is concerned with the idle wife of a young advertising executive. He is deep among his accounts, preoccupied twenty-four hours a day with somebody's soap and somebody's baby food and has no time to spare for his own wife. Their tenth anniversary celebration becomes an advertising confer-

ence and the wife of one of the biggest accounts is a cross to bear. So finally Miss Lawrence decides not to bear it.

I do not know that this is an entirely propitious start. It certainly isn't a very new start. But Mr. Raphaelson expands his situation diligently. The young husband pretends that he is going to throw up his job so that his wife will come back to him. Then he really gets fired and is grim about it. He then discovers he likes having no job. Then his wife

### "SKYLARK"

A comedy in three acts by Samson Raphaelson. Staged by the author. Setting by Donald Oenslager. Presented at the Morosco Theater on October 11, 1939, by John Golden. The cast:  
George Gorell.....Walter Gilbert  
Theodore.....Horace Sinclair  
Tony Kenyon.....Donald Cook  
Lydia Kenyon.....Gertrude Lawrence  
Ned Franklin.....William David  
Charlotte Franklin.....Gertrude Bryan  
A Maid.....Ann Driscoll  
Bill Blake.....Glenn Anders  
Myrtle Valentine.....Vivian Vance  
Harley Valentine.....Robert Burton

has her doubts and thinks of adopting a baby. Then he gets the offer of a newer and better job. His wife then decides to adopt the baby. A gloomy attorney, handsomely played by Mr. Anders but only lightly connected with the plot, regards this outcome darkly and wanders off. Everybody else seems to feel that things have been fixed up splendidly.

It is hard to decide where the author felt he was going, or precisely what he thought he was writing about. A good deal of the time, indeed, there is a tentativeness in the writing which suggests that Mr. Raphaelson wondered, too. It is an aimless anecdote, and the author has directed it rather aimlessly. It possesses Miss Lawrence, and she puts life into it. Mr. Cook seconds her admirably as the husband and Mr. Anders's sternly detached performance is one of his best. Walter Gilbert, William David, Vivian Vance and the rest also are helpful. But the play is about as inconsequential, in a nice way, as anything can be in three acts.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, October 12, 1939

## Gertrude Lawrence Appears in Samson Raphaelson's Drawing Room Comedy 'Skylark'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

FOR "Skylark," read Gertrude Lawrence. Strictly speaking it is the title of Samson Raphaelson's drawing-room comedy, which, was acted at the Morosco last evening amid the goings-on of a giddy opening. But even if the comedy were better written, it would still emerge as a vehicle for its leading actress. For Miss Lawrence, whom no one ever accused of being languid, is feeling in particularly good health and spirits these days, and she chases vagrant lines up and down the stage with enormous and brilliant animation. The collected works of William Shakespeare would turn out to be vehicles if Miss Lawrence attacked them with the gusto that possesses her now.

This is no study of beauty in repose. Miss Lawrence is, among other things, a dancer, and she enjoys motion. For present purposes she is cast as the discontented wife of a successful business man, which may sound like a dreary business. But that stock part in American fiction, comedy and life is here merely the spring-board for a stage lark by a radiant, mischievous actress who enjoys her profession. She has a fresh approach to every line, and tremendous spring for the hurdles. When the play starts running down hill she rushes it up to the top again with a kind of exultant bravado. She knows all

that any one need know about comedy acting, and she goes at it with hoydenish abandon. It is lively and fascinating—the overacting of a woman who has mastered all the idioms of stagecraft.

Probably overacting is, the sound way to treat Mr. Raphaelson's uneasy play. He has already told it between covers with a skimming style that suits it perfectly and more latitude in locale than the stage permits him. It is the story of the wife of a rising advertising tycoon who is so immersed in success and campaigns that he is useless in the

home. To flatter the wife of a rich client, he thinks nothing of ordering his wife to give her the family cook. "Skylark" is the story of a wife's rebellion and the painful business of readjustment between two highly strung married people, with a cynical bachelor hovering outside the door.

In the novel the story proceeds rapidly and easily, and the smart humors of the dialogue maintain the same pace. But Mr. Raphaelson has had considerable difficulty in making it fit the theatre. Crammed into one living room, it runs unevenly in a series of dogmatic scenes, and the subtlety of the transitions, particularly at the conclusion, results in nothing so much as obscurity. Even a light drawing room comedy needs a firmer, simpler structure than Mr. Raphaelson has managed to set up on the stage.

In the circumstances it is perhaps just as well to treat "Skylark" as a thing of scenic splendor and a platform for bravura acting. Donald Oenslager has seen to the settings, which are opulent, and Hattie Carnegie has seen to the gowns, which are a producer's ransom. As the worried husband, Donald Cook gives an attractive, mettlesome performance. Glenn Anders, shuffling amusingly through the part of the morose bachelor, speaks the cynicism with the proper sobriety. The cast is uncommonly good all the way through. It includes Walter Gilbert, who has been marked absent for long periods recently, and Gertrude Bryan, who has been absent longer than that. William David and Horace Sinclair are present to make minor parts thoroughly legal; and Vivian Vance plays the unpleasant part of a blonde harpy with sleek venom.

But Miss Lawrence is the main attraction of this brawl in a drawing room. She interprets "Skylark" literally. She takes wing.

# "Skylark"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, October 12, 1939

## Gertrude Lawrence Liked In Skylark, a New Comedy

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

GERTRUDE LAWRENCE arrived at the Morosco Theater last night to enliven the sluggish theatrical season with a high-spirited performance of Samson Raphaelson's new comedy, *Skylark*.

The word "new," as applied to this particular play, must be modified in several respects. In the first place the comedy has come a long and weary way since its first hesitant appearance somewhere in the West. It has been doctored and revised, given up for lost, and restored to life by more surgery and if it is not yet in the flush of robust health it has at least been

cured of some of its early debility. Neither is it new in respect to its contents, for there is no novelty (either on the stage or in real life) about the wedding of a man to his business to the consequent neglect of his wife. Nor in the various feminine wiles that the neglected wives exercise to prove that they have more enduring charms than a steel filing cabinet. All these situations have been laid before the public many times before, in song and story and the Saturday Evening Post, which is always a pushover for that plot.

So, in this case, I am afraid that the importance of Mr. John Golden's 1935 offering to the stage revolves rather upon Miss Lawrence's treatment of the main character, the

neglected wife, than upon the substance of the play. And here I must confess a very strong prejudice in Miss Lawrence's favor.

I like her freshness and vitality. I like the way she pats her stomach and flings her arms to the heavens. I like the abandon with which she tooses herself around on love seats and couches. I like her feminine writhings, the shrugging of her shoulders and wrinkling of her nose. I like the surprising modulation of her voice, the trickery of its occasional hoarseness, of its occasional hysteria and of its long-drawn-out emphasis of the last syllable of a phrase. As may be gathered from

these few remarks I enjoy Miss Lawrence's acting.

*Skylark*, however, is not so definitely a Lawrence play as was Rachel Crothers' *Susan and God*, nor does she have in it any great opportunity for character delineation. Lydia Kenyon, the abused wife in *Skylark*, is a normal woman with normal reactions, which is to say that she wants more evidences of love than perfunctory gifts on anniversaries. She has a normal portion of sentiment and romanticism and a normal desire to escape from the boredom of wealth gained through the sacrifice of marital happiness.

The business, which is Lydia Kenyon's rival for Tony Kenyon's affections, is advertising and it seems to me that the author has failed to use many opportunities for rich satire that might have suggested themselves to him, but this again would have further subordinated Miss Lawrence to the play—which would never do.

He has created, however, with the inestimable aid of Glenn Anders, a delightfully impudent and carefree character named Bill Blake (the good old tempter who offers the defeated wife a release from her cage) and there are moments when this charmingly wicked man completely dominates both the play, and the stage. Mr. Anders deserves the highest of compliments for his performance.

As the husband with the business obsession, Donald Cook, gives an impeccable performance as far as stage manners go. On the other hand, he is unable to convince me of the genuineness of his feelings, and his attitude towards his stage-wife, even after the third-act reconciliation, seemed to lack in warmth. Horace Sinclair, Walter Gilbert, William David, Gertrude Bryan, Robert Burton and, in particular, Miss Vivian Vance gave excellent support.

*Skylark* should have a comfortable run, despite the obviousness of its plot and if you rejoice in having Miss Lawrence back with us, as I do, you should see it by all means.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, October 12, 1939

## The Great Miss Lawrence

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THE fascinating Miss Lawrence is at the top of her form in the new play called "Skylark," and so it can safely be said that the new dramatic season has finally got into full swing. Personally I have grave doubts about her vehicle. Although it has a glossy surface, a surefire narrative and some occasional wit, it is, I think, an unoriginal and highly mechanical work, shrewd enough in its artifice but lacking all the spirit and substance of first-rate comedy writing. Miss Lawrence, however, has never looked lovelier or played with greater charm and wisdom, not even under the careful guidance of Noel Coward. In "Susan and God" some of us suspected her of throwing her fascination about a trifle too emphatically. In "Skylark" she wisely allows us to take her unparalleled charm for granted and the result is a comedy performance of unusual skill and virtuosity, transforming an unremarkable play into what is almost certain to be one of the hits of the season.

Here, not too carefully disguised, is the good old tale of the wife who found that her husband was more interested in his business than in her and proceeded to win him back. It is all so simple that even Mr. Raphaelson, the playwright, does not try to keep it up for an entire evening, but devotes his third act to a different topic. In the final section of "Skylark" the triumph of the wife is taken for granted and the author concerns himself with the task of permitting his hero to take his job back without seeming to desert her again. Fortunately, the plot never seriously gets in the way, and Mr. Raphaelson takes it with proper lightness. Familiar as the narrative is, there is no reason why it should not be the springboard for a wise and witty comedy. Unfortunately, the author has been satisfied to confine himself to routine characterizations and regulation playwrighting. All that is fresh about "Skylark" is Miss Lawrence's playing.

Nevertheless it would not be accurate to say that "Skylark" was without its interests, even as a play. There is a smoothness and polish about it in the production and in the acting; a showmanlike efficiency marks every

detail of its manufacture; a brittle sort of sentimental exploitation provides it with a certain mild emotional glow, and there is often a proper suggestion of gaiety about it. It merely happens that an air of the second-rate hangs about the writing which Mr. Raphaelson has provided, a quality of popular magazine smartness. Happily, Miss Lawrence is always present, gay, handsome, vital and immensely winning, to bolster up the weaknesses of the work with such brilliant comedy playing as to make "Skylark," for all its frailties, a play that theatergoers are almost certain to flock to. It is a remarkable personal triumph, and a richly deserved one.

Mr. Golden has given "Skylark" an attractive production and a serviceable cast. Donald Cook is excellent as the husband, making him considerably more than the stick such a character is in most plays of this kind. Glenn Anders has the audience-winning role of a sardonic, embittered and alcoholic lawyer, a combination of lovelorn suitor and understanding adviser of the wife, and he plays it with dry humor and expertness. Miss Vivian Vance is properly in character as the disagreeable wife of a big advertiser and acts as a sort of mild menace in the proceedings, while the other roles are competently handled. But Miss Lawrence is obviously the whole show. Hers is a complete triumph, and if "Skylark" becomes the financial success that I expect it to be, the credit will be entirely hers. Few plays of recent seasons have owed more to their star.

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# "Skylark"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, October 12, 1939

## Gertrude Lawrence and "Skylark" Off to a Happy Season's Start

"Skylark," a comedy by Samson Raphaelson. Produced by John Golden at the Morosco theatre, New York, Oct. 11, 1939.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THIS "Skylark," with which Gertrude Lawrence began her home work at the Morosco theatre last night, is a twitery but agreeably humanized variation on a familiar theme—that of the husband wedded to his business and neglectful, not to say forgetful, of his light-minded but adoring wife.

It is a comedy, thanks to Miss Lawrence, her able support and a nice production, that brings form, character and promise to the new theatre season. The Lawrence crowd will love it, and grow bigger with its playing.

It is, knowing the theatre fairly intimately, impossible not to be suspicious of the busy husband-neglected wife story. But, like all familiar themes, it is always subject to change in treatment.

### From the Post

Samson Raphaelson, who dramatized this version from a story which he sold to the Saturday Evening Post as "The Streamlined Heart," has taken as his protagonists an advertising executive who is a concentration of ego and talent, and one of those instinctive mothers who probably would have been happy if she could have had the baby nature and the specialists deny her.

Arriving at the ten-year anniversary of their marriage the Kenyons are, reasonably enough, beginning to get a bit on each other's nerves. He would sell practically everything he owns for a new account in his advertising business. She would give every-

thing she hasn't got for even a brief return to the old romantic days when they first met atop a Fifth avenue bus.

He would go so far as to give their highly-prized cook to the wife of a prospective client, and she'll be damned if she'll let him. He would force her to apologize to the aforementioned hell-cat, who may bring business to the firm, and she walks out into the moonlight with the hell-cat's favored legal alcoholic.

### Stewed Eccentric

Mr. Raphaelson thought to give this lawyer, a monosyllabic eccentric who knows his women, an original touch. Glenn Anders plays him and has one good scene and two, not so good, including that of his entrance,

Also one excellent scene in which he appears only at the other end of a telephone conversation. You can't see him, but he is much more convincingly human unseen than he is in the flesh. It is often that way with good character actors playing straight roles.

As for Miss Lawrence, she is the same exuberant non-conformist she loves to play in drama. Fluttery in mind and gesture, but gorgeously human and believable once she stops fluttering and gets down to the serious business of the play.

If you would see an actress and a person-sly pick up a somewhat listless stage plot and romp off victoriously with it through a second act curtain, see "Skylark" and watch Miss Lawrence steal her own show. She has no difficulty holding it through a short third act, and at the end the evening is largely hers.

### In Support

Donald Cook, a favorite leading man with this department, is a shade overemphatic and uncommonly blind as the well-intentioned advertiser who is trying to sell his bill of happiness. His discovery of the freedom that comes with the first shedding of the thralldom of a job is nicely emphasized, and he is always a believably human sample of the fool American business man.

Vivian Vance serves the hell-cat admirably, standing up to her impulsive star bravely. Horace Sinclair, Walter Gilbert, Robert Burton, Gertrude Bryan, William David all help. A Donald Oenslager setting is attractive. Mr. Raphaelson did his own directing which is spirited.

I saw "Skylark" with two audiences—one a Tuesday night preview. I may tell you they were both happy audiences.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, October 12, 1939

## "Skylark" Opens With Gertrude Lawrence

John Golden Presents Samson Raphaelson's New Comedy

By JOHN MASON BROWN

WATCHING Miss Lawrence is always entertaining. Joy spills from her eyes. Her smile is beguiling. She moves with uncanny grace, is charming to look at, dresses smartly, and has a voice of velvet which she can wrinkle as amusingly for laughter's sweet sake as she does her upturned nose. Even when she is led into overplaying, when she suddenly reverts to her musical comedy past and is misguided by the generous abandon of her acting to treating a comedy scene as if it were a black-out, she does not lose her fascination.

Hers is no ordinary personality. Neither is hers a skill commonly encountered. Her performance may get out of hand at moments. But such uncomfortable moments when they do occur (as they did last night in the final act at the Morosco) prove no more than air-pockets encountered during an otherwise delightful flight. Miss Lawrence remains entertaining to watch. And watching her in "Skylark" is genuinely entertaining.

Mr. Raphaelson's play is the kind of drama which need not fear winning the Pulitzer Prize. It is a comedy, light, hard-working, and almost arrogant in its triviality. It is a machine-made product which, though it is serviceable, can claim neither the sensitivity nor the charm which distinguished the same

author's "Accent on Youth."

It does its laughing duty for those not expecting too much. It boasts its felicitous lines and some adroitly handled situations. And, especially as played by Miss Lawrence and most of Mr. Golden's well-chosen cast, it holds the attention. But just as one trembles to think of "Skylark" without Miss Lawrence and Glenn Anders, so one prefers to think of them rather than of the comedy they adorn.

### Susan Without God

Mr. Raphaelson's story, which must be older than the Alps, will unquestionably long

be a favorite resort of both dramatists and audiences. It is concerned with nothing more or less original than the happiness which finally comes to a married couple that thinks it is ripe for divorce.

As is entirely justifiable, Mr. Raphaelson attempts to make this venerable fable his own by having the husband in question a man who loves his business so ardently that his deserted wife threatens to name it as co-respndent; by peopling his fable with representatives of other families also in advertising; and by introducing a disillusioned lawyer whose bitter comments prove hilarious as they are excellently drawn out by Mr. Anders.

The pity is that all of Mr. Raphaelson's writing in "Skylark" is not on the level with his play's happier interludes. Much of his comedy sounds like a very inferior imitation of Philip Barry. Then, too, even in his more entertaining scenes, Mr. Raphaelson has unfortunately assigned to the lawyer Mr. Anders plays so well some would-be poetic lines which must cause Mr. Anders as much embarrassment to speak as they did some of us to hear last night. Also Mr. Raphaelson's final act still seems unsatisfactorily resolved, even when from the rise of the first curtain its cheerful outcome is as plain as the nose on Jimmy Durante's face.

The truth is that though "Skylark" may have its plentiful shortcomings as a play, it does pass the time agreeably enough. Mr. Golden has cast it helpfully. Mr. Cook is too slight for the husband, but efficient in a humorous way. Vivian Vance is worthy of at least a red ribbon as a female candidate for the Dog Show. Mr. Anders is enormously funny as the lawyer. And Miss Lawrence is a joy to watch. She gives a better, far more ingratiating, and on the whole more disciplined performance than she gave in "Susan and God." It is her evening. And she makes more than the most of it, which, needless to say, allows us to do the same. It is she, who with Mr. Anders' aid, keeps "Skylark" off the ground at the Morosco.

# "See My Lawyer"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, September 28, 1939

## "See My Lawyer" Opens Abbott Farce Season at the Biltmore

"See My Lawyer," farce comedy by Richard Maibaum and Harry Clark. Produced by George Abbott at the Biltmore Theatre, New York, Sept. 25, 1939.



By BURNS MANTLE

THE George Abbott theatre season opener is a comic strip farce called "See My Lawyer," shown at the Biltmore Theatre last night. It is concerned with the efforts of a trio of eager young law students to drum up business just after they have rented an office and installed a phone.

These boys are too ethical to chase ambulances, but they are not above shanghaiing a client if one happens to stick his head in the door of their office.

One does. He is a slightly demented playboy, a kind of Broadway-Long Island-Westchester composite who is always getting his name in the papers in stories relating his latest eccentricities.

Many marriages and more abductions are charged against him. He is started for Mattewan a dozen times, but is always able to check his way out. Without the checks, which he signs freely, his career would have been painlessly and happily brief.

### Abbott Formula

This is, as any experienced playgoer will recognize, a typical Abbott farce formula, though in this instance the master has turned its staging over to Ezra Stone, an able lieutenant, who had much to do with the success and extended run of last season's "What a Life."

It is one of those farces with a sometimes substantial foundation upon which a fantastic and tricky superstructure is builded. A farce of situations in which the director believes any absurdity is worth trying at least once.

Thus the senior partner of Lee, Russo and O'Rourke turns window washer and hangs out the twenty-fourth window of the firm's office just to help build a situation that shall be comic when the playboy client hysterically approves the stunt and insists on trying it. Thus the junior partner is set upon by his associates and sent to jail on impossible

charges to make possible a second act curtain that will prolong the fooling another half hour to be devoted to phoney and, it is hoped, comic explanations.

### Audience Responds

It happens to be a type of farce that does not mean much to me. Its mechanics are so painfully obvious such laughter as they inspire is as strained and forced as the antics that inspire it.

Last night's audience, however, as well as that at a Tuesday night preview, was contrary minded and seemed filled with a good imitation of early season glee.

The best news of the evening to me is that Milton Berle, who I expected was going to be quite brashly smart and not very funny, turned out to be an excellent farceur and a convincing juvenile as well.

You could, without strain, believe that Milton was an earnest young law student, deeply in love but entirely practical in his approach to romance. He had feeling and pace and, from his vaudeville experience, a comic's instinct for gag delivery.

Helping him are the dependable sufferer, Millard Mitchell; that faun in mufti, Teddy Hart; an Ezra Stone understudy, Norman Tokar; a sympathetic ingenue, Mary Rolfe; a confidant siren, Robin Raymond, and Eddie Nugent doing his best to suggest the lunatic type of mental deficient who puts the industrialist's son-in-law into bankruptcy.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, September 28, 1939

## George Abbott Presents "See My Lawyer"

Teddy Hart, Milton Berle, and Millard Mitchell in a Farce

By JOHN MASON BROWN

WHERE there's a will, there's not always a way. Mr. Abbott's first offering of the season demonstrated this somewhat ruefully at the Biltmore last evening.

As the Messrs. Maibaum and Clark have written it, "See My Lawyer" is a farce possessed undoubtedly of a will to be funny in the mad, energetic tradition of the more hilarious and goofy Abbott farces. Certainly most of us out front were more than willing—we were eager—to greet it with guffaws. Yet, in spite of frequent causes for laughter—and hearty laughter at that—and the droll performances of such comic fellows as Milton Berle, Teddy Hart, and Millard Mitchell, it became increasingly difficult for some of us to see our way clear to laughing either as heartily as we wanted to or, as continuously as we were led to believe would be our right.

Offhand, "See My Lawyer" would seem to have the pass-key to the trophy room in Abbottland. Its story of three clientless young lawyers who suddenly find themselves

rich and harassed by attending to the legal needs of a nit-wit millionaire sounds (as an idea) full of comic possibilities. As a farce about those who chase ambulances it promises in advance to be as convulsing as was "Three Men on a Horse" in its treatment of those who follow the ponies. But the resulting play, though pleasant enough at many moments as the season's first gun, soon

proves, for all its intermittent thunder, to be a rather damp cannon cracker instead of a cannon.

Perhaps "See My Lawyer" tries too hard. Perhaps it fails the flatter on its funnybone because of having achieved its farcical reach. At any rate last night Mr. Maibaum's and Mr. Clark's nonsense saga appeared to be a kind of a streamlined "Potash and Perlmutter" concoction. Its plot, which is crazy enough to be in a straight-jacket, attempts to do with comparatively little aid from the dialogue what would have been made ridiculous once upon a time in terms of the overwriting of the "Potash and Perlmutter" dialect. It is not the craziness of the plot one regrets. It is merely that far too often for complete comfort, it allows an audience to regain its cold and dangerous sanity.

When it is funny, "See My Lawyer" can be very funny indeed. Only an ingrate could claim to have found no pleasure in the glider stretches of its writing; in Mr. Berle's well-considered and driving performance; in the irresistible dryness of Mr. Mitchell's acting of the partner forced to turn window-cleaner; in Mr. Hart's hilarious characterization of a pigny Daniel who rents desk space in the outer office; or in the more fluid and inventive stretches of Mr. Stone's direction.

But while moments of it are truly ingratiating, and most of it is passable in a negative way, the solemn and hence unfarcical truth is that Mr. Abbott's first offering must be set down as a farce, which though it outdoes Robert Bruce's spider in trying, does not quite succeed. It is victimized by its own efforts. It fails to crown itself with the fool's cap which it should wear. At least it fails to keep that fool's cap lodged jauntily on its mad head, in spite even of the valiant efforts of Eddie Nugent, in a strangely difficult and thankless part, to make madness gay.

# "See My Lawyer"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, September 28, 1939

## 'See My Lawyer,' a Goofy Farce, Opens at the Biltmore Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

UNBRIDLED goofiness is now rampant at the Biltmore Theater, George Abbott having moved "See My Lawyer" in last evening. Ga-ga tricks improve each shining moment and the pivotal character is, by admission of the authors, a cheerful lunatic, wont to steal peep machines from penny arcades, picket the Brass Rail out of sheer exuberance and pursue attractive young women with tennis rackets. It's all pretty disorderly.

And, to be sure, it is also pretty funny. Teddy Hart is present to be suppressed. Milton Berle introduces himself to the legitimate in an agreeable frenzy. Millard

Mitchell is gloomily comical, and even the authors have assisted. The authors, who are obviously gag-happy, are Richard Maibaum and Harry Clark and they have mixed their plot with an egg beater. Taking a deep breath, I approach the plot.

It is about three young lawyers who have no clients, but a fortunate connection—by love—with a delicatessen. They thus fight shy of starvation, keeping rolls in the petty cash box and mustard in an ink well. Then, when things are their blackest, they get a mad young millionaire for a client and money and tribulation pour in. The complications are alarming.

Visiting "See My Lawyer," you will learn of circumstances which make it necessary for the senior partner of a law firm to pose as a window cleaner and hang dizzily from sills. You will discover that events of a second act may place another partner in jail and that demented clients kidnap pretty secretaries who are in love with their bosses. You won't, I guess, have to believe any of this—at least, I hope you won't. "See My Lawyer" is best enjoyed by those heavily cushioned with credulity.

Grant Mr. Maibaum and Mr. Clark their lunacy and you may have a pretty good time.

### 'SEE MY LAWYER'

A farce in three acts by Richard Maibaum and Harry Clark; staged by Ezra Stone; setting by Cirkor and Robbins; presented at the Biltmore Theatre on September 27, 1939, by George Abbott. The cast:

|                         |                  |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| Pay Frankel.....        | Mary Rolfe       |
| Arthur Lee.....         | Milton Berle     |
| Joseph O'Rourke.....    | Millard Mitchell |
| Peter Russo.....        | Gary Merrill     |
| Morris Schneider.....   | Teddy Hart       |
| Seymour Trier.....      | David Hoffman    |
| Irving Frankel.....     | Norman Tokar     |
| Charlie.....            | Robert Griffith  |
| Telephone Linesman..... | Ralph Bell       |
| Robert Carlin.....      | Eddie Nugent     |
| Ichiro Kato.....        | George Hirose    |
| S. B. Jameson.....      | Pleming Ward     |
| Western Union Boy.....  | Richard Lee      |
| Shoshine Boy.....       | Walter Wagner    |
| Blossom Le Verne.....   | Robin Raymond    |
| A Man.....              | John Shellie     |
| Police Officer.....     | Carroll Ashburn  |

It isn't one of Mr. Abbott's best by a long shot. Rather too often it is sillier than it is funny and the plot entanglement is a little less ingenious than it sounds. But it is cheerfully fast, and Ezra Stone, who directed, has inherited an engaging distaste of pace from Papa Abbott. Bouncing along, "See My Lawyer" jiggles one into laughter.

The acting is fast and furious. Comical expressions dart and jump across Mr. Hart's face. Mr. Berle's farcical anxiety is contagious and Mr. Mitchell is, as always, droll. Eddie Nugent is crazy in a well-tailored fashion and Miss Mary Rolfe makes a graceful love interest. The rest who saunter, or stumble or batter their way in add to the cockeyed and pleasurable confusion.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, September 28, 1939

## Abbott's See My Lawyer Hardy Perennial Farce

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THE formula for farce which reached a hilarious height in "Room Service" is a hardy perennial, and for some time to come we may expect its yearly re-appearance under new titles and with new lines. Its basis is a group of young and impecunious men who are trying to establish themselves in commerce, the professions or the arts on a foundation of shoestrings and nerve.

Act One finds them living on stolen boloney in an office or hotel room, unable to pay the rent. Act Two discloses the sudden descent of an angel, a *deus ex machina*, who rescues them from their plight and then, at the curtain, dashes their hopes to the ground. Act Three resolves their dilemma and turns them into financial or legal or artistic successes.

In the instance of Mr. George Abbott's new play, *See My Lawyer*, which is from the typewriters of Richard Maibaum and Harry Clark, the young men are clientless law graduates. The man who rescues them from starvation is a millionaire lunatic playboy. The second and third-act climax is the discovery that they may have to lose their only client by sending him to an asylum. The final rescue is in the form of a shower of fat

checks before the client is led tenderly away by a rival lawyer.

*See My Lawyer*, I regret to say, is no Room Service and, while this tattered plot does reach occasional peaks of merriment, its absurdities are too obvious to command even fleeting belief. It contains many opportunities for laughter, but most of these consist of local allusions to the New York system of jurisprudence, or of topical wit having nothing to do with the plot and very little to do with character. As a play, even as a farce, it lacks consistency and it rambles.

The joyful moments—and, in spite of what

I have said, there are many of them—surround: for the most part, the activities of Teddy Hart as an explosive little ambulance chaser who has unpaid-for desk-room in the law offices of Lee O'Rourke and Russo; and of Millard Mitchell, late of *Kiss the Boys Goodbye*, whose careless, nonchalant attitude toward the whole world is invariably pleasing. Mr. Hart has only to stand around and look browbeaten to be funny. Mr. Mitchell is always capable of taking command of broadly humorous lines.

There will be considerable interest along Broadway, of course, in the first legitimate appearance, if you call it that, of Milton Berle. Mr. Berle's steadiness and general competence, and, above all, his restraint, were pleasant surprises. Many of us, in view of past experiences with radio stars, masters-of-ceremony, night club maestros, columnists and acrobats who have attempted to turn actor, have come to regard these essays into the higher arts with suspicion.

In this case, it seems to me our fears were groundless. Mr. Berle is, by no means the ultimate in farceurs, but he is surprisingly free from the blattancy of café atmosphere, and he gives every evidence of sincere and intelligent co-operation with his colleagues.

If any one person saves the play and turns the dullness of the first act situation into good cheer, however, it is Teddy Hart, the personification of this crazy law firm, the downtrodden process server, the oppressed Fordham graduate surrounded by Harvard men, the man who pays for the sandwiches and never gets one of them, who snares a client and never gets him.

Everything else about this play becomes inconsequential.



# "See My Lawyer"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, September 28, 1939

## Law Service

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IF "SEE MY LAWYER" can be regarded as the first play of the 1939-'40 season, then it may be said that the new dramatic year gets off to a better than usual start. Not that George Abbott's new production is any masterpiece. It is, in fact a pretty labored farce that gets its undeniable laughter virtuously by taking you by the throat and shaking it out of you. Nevertheless, it is so much more entertaining, despite the strenuous methods it uses, than the season opens within the memory of man that it deserves to be treated with consideration. Dealing with the adventures of a firm of penniless young lawyers with an eccentric playboy millionaire on their hands as their first client, "See My Lawyer" behaves in something of the manner of a minor league "Room Service" and, though it is far less skillful than that excellent farce, it does have its good rowdy moments.

Although "See My Lawyer" was staged by Ezra Stone, rather than by Mr. Abbott himself, it bears all the marks of the old master's handiwork. That is to say, of course, that it is brittle, ingenious and rapidly paced, that it is more striking in its speed and its inventive stage business than in its writing and that it contains at least one comic reference to a lavatory. Perhaps its chief achievement is that it employs that stren-

uous vaudeville and radio comic, Milton Berle, in the leading role and keeps him pleasantly subdued. I think that this feat in itself marks young Mr. Stone as a director of some talent and force. If there is any novelty at all in the writing—which most of the evidence leads one to doubt—it lies in the remarkable fact that it is a farce which contains one character with a bit of intelligence. One of the lawyers in the tale—the one played with his customary expertness by Millard Mitchell—actually behaves during the course of the noisy second-act climax with some show of a bit more than sub-normal sense.

One of the ways of wasting both time and

print would be to try telling details of the plot. It should be enough for any one to know that the four lawyer heroes of the new play are pretty much down on their luck until the daffy millionaire walks in on them and insists on their taking his business and that they pass most of the third act trying to get out of their contract. In the character of the millionaire, the authors have invented or—sidewalk gossip insisted—have transcribed more or less from life an amiable creation whose eccentricities are often surprisingly amusing. I liked in particular his method, when taking a girl out for an automobile ride, of bringing his car up to her office in the freight elevator. Comic stage madmen are usually more painful than hilarious but Mr. Robert Carlin, of "See My Lawyer," is fortunately more childlike than pathological.

Mr. Berle has never been one of my favorite comers, but here he plays with competence and modesty and manages to live down his music-hall past with considerable skill. Mr. Mitchell, who always has been one of my favorite comers, is just as shrewd and expert as usual and he makes the senior member of the law firm both a credible and a humorous figure. The millionaire is agreeably played by Eddie Nugent, sometimes of the films. I think Mr. Nugent deserves considerable credit for making his amiable fanatic a likeable person. Miss Mary Rolfe, one of the best of the younger ingenues, is earnest and human as the heroine, and Teddy Hart helps out in his familiar fashion. The others are cast with the usual Abbott skillfulness. "See My Lawyer" works terribly hard and shamelessly for its humor, but in its madcap way it achieves quite a bit of it.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, September 28, 1939

## George Abbott Opens the Farce Season With 'See My Lawyer' and Some Actors

By BROOKS ATKINSON

NOT having any of his ready-made comedies on the stage for the moment, George Abbott is showing an early-season sample, "See My Lawyer," which opened at the Biltmore last evening. It is the work of Richard Malbaum and Harry Clork, and "work" is the proper way to describe their assault upon the laugh machine. But Milton Berle (pronounced "Boil") is in it, with lanky Millard Mitchell bearing down on the funnybone and Teddy Hart convulsing everybody with his startled grimaces and marionette exits and entrances. It is a hilarious scuffle when the crises grow desperate under the relentless direction of Ezra Stone. Although it is second-rate work in comparison with such escapades as "Room Service" and "Boy Meets Girl," second-rate work is nothing to sneeze at just now. Mr. Berle, Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Hart are good mountebanks, warming up a tardy season.

Mr. Malbaum and Mr. Clork are discussing the problems of four indigent young lawyers who by a stroke of farce fortune get to represent a rich and irresponsible playboy. His car runs into their receptionist's brother at a moment when they have no clients. The accident gives them an introduction to the boodie of the barrister's profession, and they take a contract in lieu of damages. You will not be interested in all the tangles of plot. They are harum-scarum enough to set off a good laugh at well-spaced intervals, which is the chief function of farce.

Usually Mr. Abbott stands in the director's box during rehearsals, smoothing out the tangles in the performance and giving the pace the smoothness of a new motor. Ezra Stone, the

inadequate student of Shakespeare in "What a Life" is taking the master's place this time, with results that are well-intended and uneven. Some of the harassed confusion of that high school student passes over into this hard-driven performance. But the actors are all right, obviously. Although Mr. Berle has never played a dramatic performance before, he does his best work as the boyish attorney of this farce. On the musical stage he was eclectic, to use a refined word for his devotion to all the best comers in town. As a farce actor, he pays strict attention to business in a creditable fashion of his own.

Mr. Mitchell divides his time between lounging cynically around the office and doubling as a terrified window-cleaner. But it is Mr. Hart who recommends "See My Lawyer" more warmly than anything the script contains. Short in stature, thin of voice, burning up with indignation, he is a genuine droll. He provides reasonable compensation for the effort involved in making "See My Lawyer" a professional laugh show.

### These Are But a Few of the Many Subscribers to Critics' Theatre Reviews

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# "Yokel Boy"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, July 7, 1939

## 'Yokel Boy,' a Summer Musical, Opens at the Majestic Theater

B. RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

LEW BROWN shoots the works as the works haven't been shot in years in the first-act finale of his "Yokel Boy," which opened at the Majestic Theater last evening. Prayerfully, and in something of a daze, we will consider these few moments of sheer fantasy before passing on to the perhaps slightly more comprehensible passages of Mr. Brown's ample entertainment.

Mr. Brown's big scene gets under way with a blacksmith singing a piece called "Uncle Sam's Lullaby," which reports that uncle is busily trotting around soothing his nieces and nephews and assuring them that this land, which is your land and my land, will not become a war land. Then all the chorus men begin to carry armloads of shells up runways and large wheels, symbolizing large wheels, turn mightily. Then all the girls are dressed as soldiers and crawl up the sides of a pyramid, and airplanes float over them and guns and then, on my word, battleships. This symbolizes, I think, the downfall of displacement, the might of Uncle Sam, and the awareness of Lew Brown that these are desperate times which producers of musical comedies must face to the last chorus girl. Perhaps I didn't get it quite clear, but there hasn't been anything so dizzy with significance on the musical comedy stage since, at a guess, 1920.

The rest of "Yokel Boy" is slightly run of the mill after this magnificence. There is a long story in it about a boy and a girl, named

Elmer Whipple and Mary Hawkins, who go out from the intense rurality of Lexington, Mass., to Hollywood, and almost fall out of love. The immediate connection of this with the floating battleships is, no doubt, at once apparent. Elmer is a tap dancer and Mary is a girl to whom men sing love songs, while she looks up with pretty expectancy. They finally see Hollywood by airplane and come down on Lexington by parachute. Mr. Brown has imagination to an almost dangerous degree.

He also has Buddy Ebsen, lanky and attractive, and engagingly gangling as he taps, and Judy Canova, whose voice constantly gets away from her and goes shooting madly off by itself, and who is almost always highly amusing. From burlesque he has abstracted

### 'YOKEL BOY'

A musical comedy in two acts; music and lyrics by Lew Brown, Charlie Tobias and Sam H. Stept; dances staged by Gene Snyder; sets by Walter Jagemann; costumes by Frances Feist; presented at the Majestic Theater on July 6, 1939, by Lew Brown. The cast: Elmer Whipple . . . . . Buddy Ebsen Judy . . . . . Judy Canova Tiny . . . . . Dixie Dunbar Punko Parks . . . . . Phil Silvers Spud . . . . . Jackie Heller Mary Hawkins . . . . . Lois January Cliff Hawkins . . . . . Ralph Riggs Blacksmith . . . . . Mark Plant Mr. Rubbish . . . . . Lew Hearn Grandpa Hawkins, Mayor . . . . . Charles Althoff Mrs. Hawkins . . . . . Almira Sessions Annie . . . . . Ann Canova Hank . . . . . Zelle Canova Jimmy Powell . . . . . Ralph Holmes Sheriff . . . . . Ben Roberts Angelina Bouchet . . . . . Helene Standish Galeman . . . . . Sidney Salar Another galeman . . . . . Jack Richards Assistant to Punko Parks . . . . . Ray Clarke Doorman . . . . . Dick Langdon Marie . . . . . Ruth Rathbun

Phil Silvers, who is a good rough comic with enough to do to keep him, and the audience, happy. "Yokel Boy" also profits by the services of Dixie Dunbar and Jackie Heller, both of whom are nimble and diminutive and engaging, and Lois January, a pretty girl.

All the other pretty girls are costumed in good, emphatic colors and seasonably unemphatic wisps and dance with cheerful agility. The songs are pleasant and several of them have swing, and "Yokel Boy" is a perfectly all right show. There may be a good deal of plot, but there is always that first-act finale. It is a thing which few of us who survived will soon forget.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, July 7, 1939

## Yokel Boy a Melodious and Pleasing Offering

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THERE are so many superb things about Lew Brown's Yokel Boy, which arrived last night at the Majestic Theater, that it becomes another must in the Visitors' Handy Guide Book to New York.

Admitting its faults—and it has plenty of them, including a wispy book that might be thrown away without any definite damage—it still brims with talent, sparkling music and the best ensemble dancing you ever saw outside of Rockefeller Center.

It has Judy Canova, acting up as a zany Sis Hopkins in the well-known manner that has endeared her to the radio fans. It has Buddy Ebsen, shuffling and tapping and shucking his way through familiar and unfamiliar dance routines. It was Dixie Dunbar, who ought to be to the gay young bloods of today what little Ann Pennington was to us old dogs of the Ziegfeld era. And Phil Silvers, bringing a touch of burlesque which is so essential to modern musicals.

### Melodies Are Appealing

There is, as you will see, a lot of talent there, but I am inclined to believe that a great deal of Yokel Boy's appeal will lie in the lilt and swing of its melodies and, as I remarked above, the perfection of its dancing. Incidentally, the reason behind this latter perfection is obvious, for Gene Snyder staged the dances—and you know the Rockettes?

The plot, if we must talk about such

things, is quickly told. Country girl goes to Hollywood and leaves boy behind. Boy follows and makes good (I told you so). Girl flops. Reconciliation. Finale.

With that off your mind, we can turn to some of the music as it emerges from the horns of Al Goodman's orchestra. The only credits in the program are given to Mr. Brown, Charlie Tobias and Sam H. Stept for lyrics and music, so it is impossible to distinguish the separate hits. Those, however, that continue running through your head after the last curtain are Lem and Sue. I Know I'm Nobody, Let's Make Memories Tonight (to my mind the most exquisite of the show), and The Ship Has Sailed. You will be hearing these, I am sure, over the radio and on the platters for months to come.

### Old Tricks Used

For divers reasons, I am inclined to believe that Mr. Brown designed this show for our Fair visitors. One of these reasons is its opening at practically the top of the thermometer and the height of Broadway's annual lethargy. Another is that he has made use of good old-theatrical hokum, particularly in the finale of the first act, designed to stir the blood of the rural patriot, rather than the New York night club sophisticate.

Miss Canova's style of comedy is exactly what you would expect after hearing her on the radio, but you may be surprised at her agility and stage presence. She has two big moments, one as Catherine the Great, the other as a town gal taking a music lesson from the affectionately brutal Mr. Silvers. As for Mr. Ebsen he is—well, Buddy Ebsen, a great dancer with the kind of personality that reaches its mark.

### Miss Dunbar Is Breezy

In calling Miss Dunbar the Ann Pennington of 1939, I mean it as a profound compliment. She has all the pertness, the breeziness of youth, wrapped up in a pint-size bundle of cuteness. Her most striking dance number was one with the Yokel Girls called Comes Love, which followed Miss Canova's riotous demonstration of the futility of battling against Cupid. She had another excellent dance number with Mr. Ebsen and I would have wished for more of the same. Jackie Heller, who is about Miss Dunbar's size, also is of considerable help in putting over an occasional number.

Lois January, coming to the stage by way of Hollywood, showed great promise in a sweet, simple role that gave her little opportunity (outside of the Let's Make Memories number) to demonstrate that she actually has a charming voice and pleasing manner. A list of the assets of Yokel Boy should include the stage direction of Jerome Whyte, the scenic designs of Walter Jagemann, and the excellent voice of a young man named Mark Plant.

# "Yokel Boy"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, July 7, 1939

## Lew Brown, Plus Some Composers, Plus Les Girls, Fight the Second Battle of Lexington

MR. LEW BROWN came back to the Broadway wars last evening, bringing "Yokel Boy," as an earnest of his affection for any visiting crowds that may be lured from Mr. Whalen's park by night, as well as for such New Yorkers as may be loitering around Times Square in the heat and strife of July. Those of the latter who were gathered in the Majestic—the former haven't had their chance yet—appeared to think that Mr. Brown might just get away with it. For it is, as they were saying wisely, Summer.

"Yokel Boy" is none of your flashy Winter shows, opening with many names upon the stage and with ermine and exploding flashlight bulbs in the audience. It is mild in manner and it has no great stars to block the street before the stage door with autograph seekers. It has plenty of good music. It has a chorus which to rheumy July eyes seems as pretty as a chorus can come, and it is a chorus that can dance, and does, either behind the principals or by itself. Very nice, when every one is getting along without the book.

That book. It seems that a movie company is on location at Lexington, Mass., taking a picture of some local historical event. Boy has met girl and is about to marry same when girl is offered a job in Hollywood. For the good of Lexington she accepts, and how that one must burn up Lexington, 1939. Boy follows to Hollywood, and does he turn out to be the son of "Jack Donagel," the great

dancer, and is he a great success as a dancer, himself? You will have seen this, you also will have seen the prop Hollywood characters, the movie magnate, the director, the gentlemen who say Yes.

But enough. It is July and up there on the stage is Judy Canova of the Ann, Zeke and Judy Canovas. A rowdy mixture of Beatrice Lillie and other comedienne along parallel lines in the general direction of Fanny Brice, this one pretty much puts the Summer in its place. As "Catherine the Great," she tells the legend of that lady of the Russians, in "Jukin'" she interprets the South, with "Comes Love" she shows that she can look at an honest sentiment, face to face. Quite a girl, on the whole.

For the others: Buddy Ebsen is the boy, the Elmer Whipple, who is the dancing son of the great Donagel, and it is not news now that he is a good dancer. Dixie Dunbar also is present, as dancer and singer, and Lois January, who is the other half of the alleged romance. Jackie Heller, Phil Silvers, Ralph Riggs and Lew Hearn are assorted characters of Lexington, and/or Hollywood and Mark Plant sings the song that introduces one of the show's strangest bits of business—the first act finale, where a plea for Americanism is all mixed up, in a nice symbolic way, of course, with shells, airplanes, guns, the chorus dressed as soldiers, etc., like the thumping epics of '17.

The composers and lyricists probably remain the stars. In order: Mr. Brown, Charlie Tobias and Sam H. Stept. If they just had a book, too, they would be something beyond a Summer show.

L. N.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, July 7, 1939

## 'Yokel Boy' Makes Good Bit of Noise and Fun at the Majestic

"Yokel Boy," musical comedy by Lew Brown, Charlie Tobias and Sam H. Stept, produced at the Majestic Theatre, New York, July 6, 1939.

★ ★ ★  
By JOHN CHAPMAN

WHEN you learn that the first title of "Yokel Boy," which opened last night at the Majestic, was "Yokel Boy Makes Good," you know all you need to know about the plot. In fact, you may know even more about it than does Lew Brown, the producer, for it is an extremely loose-jointed, brash and slap-dash musical comedy.

There being nothing in it to make you mad, "Yokel Boy" is all to the good. There being quite a bit in it to make you laugh, or hum, it is so much to the better. Maybe it would be a shame to give it the Critic's Curse and say it is a big, noisy Summer show which should please the visitors' trade.

It's about a movie company on location at a farm near Lexington, Mass. They're making a Revolutionary War picture and on the farm are a boy and a girl. The girl is beautiful so she is whisked away to Hollywood. The boy hitchhikes after her and, being the dancing son of the late Jack Donagel, he clicks in pix a lot better than she does.

Maybe Buddy Ebsen is supposed to be the son of Florenz Ziegfeld's Jack Donagel. Anyhow, he is the yokel boy of the show. He is amiable, awkward, a good hayseed type and a pretty good dancer, but without the winsome awkwardness and the humorous feet of Donagel himself.

### Canova Calls 'Em

The laughs are as broad as a Lexington, Mass., barn door. Judy Canova wanders in and out, yodeling, shouting and mugging songs. This reporter had to leave a little before the show broke on account of having to catch a deadline, and as he emerged into 44th St. he looked up the block expecting to meet the Borden herd of cows from the World's Fair. Surely they must have heard Miss Canova and got over the bridge by this time.

Well, nigh perfectly in the Broadway tradition of comedy is Phil Silvers as a Hollywood sub-executive who knows all the answers and

all the alibis. Unabashed and glib and quite fast in the head, Mr. Silvers represents excellent casting.

Among the pleasures list the appearance of Ralph Riggs as an old hooper down on the farm. Mr. Riggs, once a top-flight dancer and later an always satisfying comedian, does a time-step and dialogue with Ebsen which make a fine scene. List also Dixie Dunbar in a couple of pert dances. Lois January as the good-looking heroine and Mark Plant, whose larynx is as big as his biceps, baritoneing his way through a first-act finale to finale all first-act finale.

### Peace at a Price

Producer Brown wasn't going to miss any beats with that first-act curtain. He calls it "Uncle Sam's Lullaby" and it's about as soothing as an impacted wisdom tooth. While the lyric conveys a message of peace the music is martial, and on the stage a whole war is fought with soldiers, beautiful nurses, battleships and squadrons of planes. Peace—it's wonderful!

The songs, of tested rhythmic patterns, are good. By Mr. Brown, Charlie Tobias and Sam H. Stept, they include "Comes Love," "It's Me Again" and others you'll be hearing. The dances, by a youngster from the Radio City Music Hall named Gene Snyder, are more than ordinarily well devised and splendidly executed by a good-looking chorus. The scenery, by another newcomer named Walter Jagemann, is handsome, workable and in the spirit of the show. And it is a pleasure to see Al Goodman dancing those big shoulders up and down in an orchestra pit again.



# "Yokel Boy"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, July 7, 1939

## Lew Brown Returns From Hollywood With "Yokel Boy"

Buddy Ebsen, Judy Canova and Others in a Musical Comedy About the Movies

By WILLELLA WALDORF

LEW BROWN, the song writer, has returned to Broadway from Hollywood with a new musical comedy entitled "Yokel Boy" which was duly produced last night at the Majestic Theatre. Mr. Brown's songs are tuneful and danceable, but his musical comedy is a routine affair with a meager Hollywood plot about a hick from Lexington, Mass., who makes good in the movies by accident.

It is astonishing what hayseeds the Lexingtonians turn out to be on the stage at the Majestic. In the opening scene the local yokel boys were dressed in such quaint suitings that we thought Mr. Brown was putting on a period piece. It developed,

however, that the time was the present, and that a movie company from Hollywood was giving the Massachusetts hicks a thrill by filming the Battle of Lexington on the spot. It takes a satirist of no mean order to make anything very spirited out of a scene kidding the movies these days, and the humorous moments in "Yokel Boy" are only mildly entertaining, seldom, if ever, rising to hilarity. Mr. Phil Silvers, as a Hollywood opportunist, works himself into a lather in the interest of comedy and succeeds pleasantly when the book is not too much for him. And Miss Judy Canova, of the Hill-Billy Canovas, wrenches her face and figure into odd geometric patterns and utters sounds like a broadcasting studio in distress to the delight of sundry listeners.

But on the whole "Yokel Boy" is light on comedy. Its big moments are the serious kind that used to be found back in the days when no Broadway musical show was complete without a first-act finale involving a stalwart baritone, bare to the waist, chopping down a tree or pounding on an anvil, while the history of Uncle Sam's armed forces was reviewed by means of tremendous scenic effects plus regiments of chorus girls in overseas helmets and a tense expression.

### "Uncle Sam's Lullaby"

These solemn patriotic spectacles used to wear us down in the old days, but we realized that they were part of the system, and bore up as nobly as possible. It seemed the knell for this sort of thing had rung a couple of seasons ago, however, when the Shuberts actually permitted Bert Lahr, armed with an axe, to cut-boom the whole stalwart baritone tribe while he chopped, chopped, chopped and the chips fell lyrically all around. But the old spirit isn't dead yet. Not a bit of it.

This has been a violently patriotic year in the theatre and Lew Brown has topped it off with a first-act finale in "Yokel Boy" that can only be described in Hollywood terms—it's colossal. Mark Plant (who really has a nice baritone voice, poor fellow) came out garbed as a stalwart American blacksmith (minus the spreading chestnut tree—an oversight that will doubtless be remedied at an early date) and proceeded to boom something about "Uncle Sam's knocking at your door singing 'Sleep tight, my baby . . . there won't be any more war—That's Uncle Sam's Lullaby'."

The stage was thereupon filled with Minute

Men, Indians, the Army, the Navy, the Marines, West Point Cadets, battleships, tanks, airplanes flying in formation and hordes of chorus girls in overseas helmets and that tense expression. This was a trifle confusing in view of the song, but we gathered this is how Uncle Sam is putting up a firm front to soothe a baby into sweet, untroubled sleep. The number was introduced by a fiery radio speech credited to Walter Winchell, and it left us completely exhausted.

The second act went on with the story of how Buddy Ebsen, the Yokel Boy, who was supposed to be the son of a great dancer named "Jack Donegal" (obviously the late Jack Donahue), made good on the screen while his girl friend, also from Lexington, was a flop, and how they got fed up with Hollywood and went back to Lexington in the private plane of a cinematic rouse, and bailed out picturesquely in a cloud effect by way of finale.

### Some Good Tunes and Agile Dancing

Mr. Ebsen, the loose-jointed young fellow who has been in Hollywood himself and is making a return to the stage in this vehicle, is properly shy, modest and hickish and his dancing is still very engaging. Dixie Dunbar, a pert little piece, who seemed to have nothing whatever to do with the plot, was always welcome with her stepping, and Lois January as the girl friend was pleasant to look at and did what she could in a role so routine that it was impossible to be much of anything in it but a rubber stamp. Ralph Holmes, son of Taylor, as the cinematic rouse, was called upon to simulate intoxication throughout the evening.

On the whole, however, the impression was one of uninspired material and very little to remember except for a few good tunes that fell pleasantly on the ear and will doubtless be played at length by dance bands here. Miss Canova, who was the big hit of the show in Boston, we understand, has an amusing routine and would doubtless be funnier if her material had a little more variety. She is, however, a specialist more suitable for toning up a show here and there rather than carrying the major burden as she was forced to do last night. Her "Catherine the Great" number, widely heralded, seemed to fall rather flat.

It would be pleasant to welcome Mr. Brown, who is a good song writer, back from Hollywood with more cheers than we are able to muster here, but we gravely fear that "Yokel Boy" is going to have its troubles filling the Majestic at Broadway musical rates. After all, another and much better show about "Hollywood," "Stars in Your Eyes," recently failed to fill the Majestic even with such names as Ethel Merman and Jimmy Durante to dangle before the customers.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, July 7, 1939

## Comes "Yokel Boy"

By HERBERT DRAKE

IN "YOKEL BOY" Lew Brown has brought us a regulation Broadway musical show, one of those artifactual contrivances aimed at the tired business man with a bow to the Palace Beach experts. Last night was a premiere for the Main Stem elite. The cream of the agent-and-manager society was on hand to grace the occasion and not a plate of borshst was served at Lindy's until the curtain dropped well after eleven. Mr. Brown has most of a musical show on display, with several really good songs, and he has a handsome cast, but it is not quite enough to be more than a fairly amusing evening.

The structure on which the activity at the Majestic Theater is hung is supposed to be a tale of a young man, son of a famous dancer (Jack Donegal). He is the Yokel Boy and, for a time it appears that we are in for comic hedonics but everything turns out all right when it seems that the natives are all retired Variety readers and just itching to get into the next scene which is Hollywood. There is something about a romance and frequent if unexplainable lapses into production numbers. The boy is Buddy Ebsen and the girl a newcomer, Lois January.

Mr. Ebsen displays his talented feet and his little-boy-showing-off-while-walking-the-fence manner and Miss January sings nicely. Ebsen is strictly an expert dancer. The perked up interludes are supplied by Judy Canova and Phil Silvers. Miss Canova is a mountain gal comedian with a loosely articulated skeleton and jagged vocal cords. She sings "Comes Love" with devastating effect and carries on with rambling abandon, but falls off the crags when she tries an item

about Catherine the Great. That one requires a mountain cabin Bea Lillie.

The hero of the evening is one Phil Silvers, a burlesque emeritus who carries just enough of the gutter savoir faire of his favorite art to give "Yokel Boy" a little tang. He is all the comedy there is (except for Miss Canova's expert gangling). Another happy performer is Dixie Dunbar, considerably improved over her last appearances. Miss Dunbar, who is once high to Lee Shubert, was graduated from his "Life Begins at 40" and is now a brighter, gayer, and, it must be noted, more incandescent dancer and singer.

Producer Brown, being a girls' and music purveyor of distinction in his field, has decked his settings with handsome choristers. They are prettily undressed and drilled to a point which caused one of the borshst boys behind this department to remark, "Lookit, just like those rockets." The scenery is purposeful and the supporting cast is earnest. A new high in mechanical contrivances and a new low in political comment happens at one and the same time in the Uncle Sam's Lullaby production number, which closes the first act. Planes zoom, guns boom, girls in nurses' uniforms drag other girls in khaki to the safety of the wings, soldiers march, flags wave and Mark Plant sings something about peace at any price. It is pretty hard to determine whether Mr. Brown wants peace or war but it isn't hard to discover that what he needs is more comedy and a repaced show.

# "The Streets of Paris"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, June 20, 1939

## There's Hellzapoppin' in This "Streets of Paris" Revue, Too

"The Streets of Paris," musical revue assembled by the Messrs. Shubert in association with Olsen and Johnson. Produced at the Broadhurst Theatre, New York, June 19, 1939.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

**B**OBBY CLARK had just sung "Robert the Rouse," who comes from Reading, Pa., and a fat little fellow named Lou Costello had worked his way riotously through an experience in a hospital ward when I had to leave "The Streets of Paris" at the Broadhurst last night.

That's the trouble with these playgoing jobs. Things are usually warming up appreciably when duty calls and your servant is forced to go about his job.

Enough had gone before, however, to stamp this new revue as one of the top scorers in its class. It is much in the "Hellzapoppin'" manner, but with a shade more class.

There are, for instance, at least half a dozen novelties. Novelties in the sense that they are new to Broadway.

The first of them is a flashing songstress with twinkling eyes from down Argentine way. Her name is Carmen Miranda. Senorita Miranda sings three Spanish songs to the accompaniment of her own sextet of guitarists.

She is, you might say, the Raquel Meller of South America. Her songs are probably favorites of the hot spots of Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires and Montevideo. They are all of a pattern and carry a provocative sway of the Miranda hips with them.

They Liked Miranda

This young lady was generously acclaimed by her first American audience. Her act is of a typical night club character, and I have an idea she will be creating sensations in the 52d St. district before she sails for home.

A second novelty is a pair of zanies, or one zany and the straight fellow who works with him, billed as Abbott and Costello. These two are much on the Olsen and Johnson order. They trained in burlesque and made their first big hit working on the Kate Smith hour.

Costello (though I did not confirm this fact) is the short, fat fellow looking as much like

our busy little Mayor as any one who comes quickly to mind. He takes his punishment and sets the laughs. He is immensely funny as the victim of the hospital maniacs. And he and Abbott have a variant of the three-shell game that adds new laughs to familiar tricks.

More Novelties

In addition to these there is Jean Sablon, an ingratiating Parisian with songs. And an amazing toe dancer, Gloria Gilbert, spinning such a series of whirls as you have not seen before.

And Ben Dova, who devotes ten minutes to trying to break his neck and comes frightfully close. And Mons Hoffman, who will pour you a dozen different cocktails out of one shaker, and then top off with a mug of beer and a chocolate soda.

"The Streets of Paris" is distinctly Bobby Clark's meat. It is burlesque in satin and rice powder. More rice powder than satin, the girls being frankly and often beautifully displayed in person and in the flesh.

The music by James McHugh seems to fit perfectly. There is no time to pick out the songs or even the singers, though Raymond Finay and Della Lind seemed to be doing a lot of it quite satisfactorily with Margot, Kate and Evelyn Hylton filling in as a trio.

There were some nice costumes by Irene Sharaff. Robert Alton did the dances and Edward Duryea Dowling the direction and lighting.

It is a crowded affair, and likely to set the World's Fair visitors right on their ears.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, June 20, 1939

## "The Streets of Paris" Opens at the Broadhurst Theatre

An Opulent and Highly Entertaining New Revue Reaches  
Broadway

By WILLELLA WALDORF

**I**T IS not necessary to purchase a French-English dictionary before attending "The Streets of Paris" at the Broadhurst Theatre. The ladies of the ensemble are referred to in the program as "Les Beantes." Monsieur Jean Sablon is a genuine import with a fetching accent, and the festivities transpire in such Gallic rendezvous as the Cafe de la Paix and the boudoir of a "grand cocotte," but the entertainment is distinctly of the American-in-Paris variety, supplied by Robert (the Rouse) Clark, Mlle. Luella Gear, Monsieur "Think a Drink" Hoffman, who turns water into wine (or anything else on order); Abbot and Costello, les zanies, and a horde of other diverting performers topped off by Senorita Carmen Miranda of Rio de Janeiro, who demonstrates "The Sous American Way" in a first-act finale that had the audience cheering last night.

"The Streets of Paris" is a "summer show" only inasmuch as it happens to have been produced in June. It is as opulent and as giddy as any winter revue Broadway has seen in years and a good deal funnier than most. The mad, something-happening-every-minute technique of "Hellzapoppin'" is again in evidence on the comedy side, plus an elegant tone in decor, costumes and staging. "The Streets of Paris," in fact, might be called a "Hellzapoppin'" all dressed up and gone into cafe society.

It is not necessary at this juncture, however,

for anybody to express concern for the plight of the "Hellzapoppin'" stars and impresarios, Olsen and Johnson, for they are co-producers of their new rival, with the Messrs. Shubert.

It is cheering to watch Bobby Clark at it again after some three years away from Broadway. He has several amusing sketches written to his measure, and his numbers with Luella Gear are reminiscent of the palm days when he used to team up with Charlotte Greenwood in the best of the Music Box Revues. He has, by the way, a new version of the old "We don't sing so good but we sing loud" crack of Clark and McCullough fame. "I don't sing so good," he observes after some particularly strenuous warbling, "but at least you can un-

derstand the words!" One of his funniest numbers is a duo with blonde Della Lind, who hails from Vienna. The two of them step through a song and dance scene without turning a hair while Apaches break chairs over the heads of their fellows, knives fly, shots ring out and bodies fall in heaps all over the premises.

The Messrs. Abbott and Costello, burlesque and radio comedians making their debut in a revue, turn in several madcap numbers in which Costello, the dead-pan member of the team, manages to be very funny indeed. Mr. Sablon of Paris not only sings engagingly, and acts as a suave master of ceremonies with Gallic charm, but looks like Clark Gable.

It is, however, Senorita Carmen Miranda who is the big news of "The Streets of Paris." It is a tribute of no mean order to her personality to say that she actually lives up to the tremendous build-up that precedes her entrance in the finale of the first act. The newcomer from Brazil—discovered in a Rio night club by Lee Shubert during a South American cruise—is heralded with as much preliminary pomp as a victorious emperor returning from the wars. They did everything last night but play the grand march from "Aida" and bring on the elephants.

The Brazilian, accompanied by six compatriots playing native instruments and singing a bit when they felt so inclined, turned out to be a vivid creature seething with what Hollywood calls "comph." She sings with plenty of hip motion, you can see the whites of her eyes in the twenty-first row, and when she insinuates one of her Brazilian ditties into the audience with the dexterity of a snake charmer, the effect is devastating. As an advertisement for Roosevelt's good-neighbor policy, she is worth half a hundred diplomatic delegations. It's that "Sous American way."

Among the others who help out with the entertainment, a special word must be said for the remarkable talents of Monsieur "Think a Drink" Hoffman, a magician who pours martinis, brandies, highballs, chocolate sodas, and even hot coffee with cream on the side out of obviously empty shakers or pitchers of plain water. The drinks are handed to thirsty members of the audience and they're the real thing. Just one of the numerous high-spots of a gala evening.

# "The Streets of Paris"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, June 20, 1939

## 'The Streets of Paris,' a Bright Revue, Opens at the Broadhurst

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THE Messrs. Shubert, sustained by the indefatigable Olsen and Johnson and encouraged by reports that a few crumbs have begun to drop from the fair's table, presented a bright new show last evening at the Broadhurst. As becomes the season, it is a show full of girls, all very pretty and highly visible. Bobby Clark is in it, too, and that man who apparently distills drinks on order and other wonders.

The chief of the wonders comes from Brazil and is called Carmen Miranda. She has the face of an animated gargoyle and entrancing movements and whatever else it is that makes the toasts of towns. She sings and sways a little and summons the audience with small fingers and the audience responds. With such elusive graces she stopped "The Streets of Paris" last evening and gave it some too few moments of her own distinction. Otherwise it is chiefly nice and bright and busy and girly as a summer show should be.

Mr. Clark is a little handicapped at the beginning by the refusal of his material to sound quite as funny on the stage as it no doubt sounded when Tom McKnight, Edward Duryea Dowling, Charles Sherman and others were chuckling over it in their studies. Miss Luella Gear has rather brighter moments and animates them with her quietly shrewd com-

edy. Jean Sablon, who has been brought from Paris for the occasion, provides Gallic charm, and a lot of people dance gayly, the girls in wisps. Mr. Olsen and Mr. Johnson seem to have taken the comedy in hand toward the end and then the revue grows blithely ga-ga. Abbott and Costello go noisily mad and Mr. Costello, who wanders vaguely into a French rest cure, is haunted by apparitions, each daffier than the one before and all of them like things out of "Hellsapoppin'." I find that, in reasonable doses, this is much funnier than in large takes. There's a lot of shooting in it, though.

Lawrence L. Goldwasser and Irene Sharaff.

### 'THE STREETS OF PARIS'

A revue in two acts, presented at the Broadhurst Theater on June 19, 1939, by the Messrs. Shubert in association with Olsen and Johnson; music by James McHugh; lyrics by Al Dubin; additional numbers by Harold J. Rome; sketches by Tom McKnight, Charles Sherman and S. Jay Kaufman; dances ensembles staged by Robert Alton; costumes by Irene Sharaff; production directed and lighted by Edward Duryea Dowling; settings by Lawrence L. Goldwasser. In the cast are: Bobby Clark, Luella Gear, Abbott and Costello, Carmen Miranda, Jean Sablon, Della Lind, Yvonne Bouvier, Gloria Gilbert, Jo and Jeanne Readinger, Gower and Jeanne, Margaret Irving, John McCauley, Ward and Van, the Hyton Sisters, Ben Dova and many others.

who did the settings and costumes, have made it all agreeable to look at, although neither of them has been much assailed by inspiration. James McHugh's music is nice to dance to and Jo and Jeanne Readinger, Jeanne Tyler, Gower Champion and others dance it with spry step. Once Mr. Clark and a girlish companion sing tranquilly in a Paris cafe while warring apaches tear it apart, and it is fun to watch Mr. Clark step confidently over corpses and not even falter with a knife in the seat of his own pants. Another time he pantomimes the part of five men in a stirring melodrama and thuds from side to side behind the set while Miss Gear nervously holds the fort.

I feel vaguely that, with so much entertainment salted through it, "The Streets of Paris" ought to seem routine less often than it does. But this is a pretty vague feeling and not to be taken seriously. It is all lively and Carmen Miranda is grand. And the girls are going to be mighty comfortable in July.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, June 20, 1939

## The Streets of Paris Full of Hilarious Rowdy-dow

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

LAST night's opening of the Shuberts' new revue, The Streets of Paris, called back a few of the drama critics from their country estates, but some of them ignored the summons and others were flying to China and similar outlandish places and so they didn't come. I feel sorry for them today, for they missed something.

It appears that the Shuberts, with the connivance of Olsen and Johnson, who are listed as associate producers, have uncorked another "Hellsapoppin'" cast in the general spectacular fashion of that epoch-making production, but marked by certain differences that have, to my mind, improved the formula.

There is even a historical similarity about the two productions. You may remember that Olsen and Johnson had been knocking around the country practically ever since the civil war, convulsing the natives with their ingenuous brand of humor, before they invaded Broadway to stay apparently, permanently.

### Second Comic Invasion

Well, there is in The Streets of Paris another team called Abbott and Costello (Bud and Lou) who first met in burlesque some ten years ago, and previous appearances in New York seem to have been only in theatrical agents' offices. Make no mistake about it, they constitute the second great comic invasion of Broadway, and they are here to stay. They, together with Bobby Clark, of the famous

team of Clark and McCullough, carry the burden of comedy through three hours of joyful rowdy-dow.

This is not drawing-room comedy. There are no delicate wisps of wit in it. It is slambang, knock-down-and-drag-out, poke-in-the-nose comedy, done with an exquisite sense of timing and such rapid-fire action that it hypnotizes an entire audience first into mellowness and then into delirium.

But comedy is not all. I have often been told (and never believed it) the story of the actress whose admirers unhitched the horses from her barouche and hauled her down to Rector's for a champagne supper after her triumphant opening. Last night having seen a Miss Carmen Miranda, whom Lee Shubert discovered last year in Brazil, stop the show at the close of the first act, I would not have been averse to joining such a procession, in lieu of un-

hitching the horses we might have taken out the engine of somebody's Rolls.

### Miranda Appearance Brief

Miss Miranda's appearance is brief. She sings, with a sparkling charm that cannot be described, some scintillating and staccato songs of Brazil that may or may not be among the three hundred phonograph records that have given her spreading fame, and her performance knocks the seat right out from under you.

If all this seems to be slighting Mr. Clark, who is given top billing in the program, let me assure you that it is unintentional, for this old master of comedy, be of the painted glasses and trick cigar, is at top form, in some of the funniest sketches that were ever written for him. His burlesque of a "protsan" actor, dashing madly from door to door in six character parts, is worth traveling miles to see.

The production is lavishly mounted, and boasts the most beautiful chorus (outside of the International Casino) that has been seen this year.

### Other Bright Personalities

There are a number of other bright personalities in this riotous vaudeville. Luella Gear is among the talented comedians. Yvonne Bouvier, who has long delighted the white-tie set at the St. Moritz, has her chance on the stage and does brilliantly. Ward and Van had me weak with laughter with their harp and violin burlesque. Jo and Jeanne Readinger, dancing twins, are discoveries of the first magnitude, and Jean Sablon, an importation from France, reminds me of Maurice Chevalier in the days when Chevalier was good.

The music, by James McHugh and Harold J. Rome carries the fun along easily and you needn't pay any attention to the lyrics.

Finally, I would like to say a word for the new (to the stage) dancing team of Gower and Jeanne, one of the brightest, most graceful and refreshingly clean couple that have reached Broadway in years. They come by way of the Rainbow Room.

What with the Worlds Fair and The Streets of Paris, New York is a grand place to live just now.



# "The Streets of Paris"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, June 20, 1939

## "The Streets of Paris" Moves to Broadway

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ALTHOUGH they are calling it "The Streets of Paris," the vagabonds of Broadway should feel at home. For the revue that went off at the Broadhurst last evening is "Paris-a-poppin," with the emphasis on knockabout fooling. Among those slapping the stick most uproariously, pay careful attention to Bobby Clark, Luella Gear and Abbott & Costello, and listen prudently to Ward & Van when they are not feeling artistic. Oom Bobby is in top form in a demented whirling sketch that keeps him racing through four quick-change parts. Presently he is promenading exuberantly through a blue ballad about Robert, the rone of Reading, Pa., which uses all his comic magnificence with the strut and came that have been his trade-marks for years.

Out of vaudeville and motion-picture stage shows some one has had the wisdom to bring Lou Costello and Bud Abbott to town with some remarkably gusty stuff. They belong to the traditional school of mountebanks that pairs a dazed clown with an abusive straight man, and throws water freely in its most inspired moments. Out of deference to press

time, your correspondent was unable to remain for a sketch that puts Bobby Clark and Costello and Abbott on the stage at the same moment, which ought to be worth some sort of prize. For Costello and Abbott are also pretty funny fellows in low-comedy antics.

As for the viper-tongued Gear, she contributes a venomous serenade to Neville Chamberlain, talks some wonderfully intelli-

gible Middle Western French according to S. Jay Kaufman's formula and helps Oom Bobby cut up disorderly capers. Ward and Van, in ragamuffin attire, play the harp and violin in ill-natured competition. Probably "Think a Drink" Hoffman ought not to be included among the merry andrews. But his celebrated act that turns water into any kind of drink on the spur of the moment must be set down as a major entertainment worth laughing at, since it cannot be soberly explained.

Since "The Streets of Paris" are knee-deep in comedians we need not complain very seriously about the lack of song-writers and artists. Perhaps Lee et J. J. Shubert Cie are taking the big stage revue of Paris as their model literally and are aping the tawdry dullness of that kind of tinsel bore. The production numbers include so many cloth-leaved trees that sometimes the show looks like a reforestation program. Jean Sablon, an amiable young Frenchman, tries gallantly but hopelessly to introduce a carefree Gallic note, and the chorus girls, akin-deep in atmosphere, strike what Broadway thinks a Paris pose ought to be.

As a matter of fact, South America contributes the most magnetic personality "The Streets of Paris" have to offer. She is Carmen Miranda, whom Lee Shubert has fetched back from Brazil as the best memento of a cruise he took last winter. The Miranda sings rapid-rhythmed songs in Spanish to the accompaniment of a Brazilian band. She hardly moves outside an area of six square feet; she sings with her eyes closed and her gestures are unobtrusive. But she radiates heat that will tax the Broadhurst air-conditioning plant this summer. Brazilian Miranda and the Yankee comics turn "The Streets of Paris" into quite a show for World's Fair transients and foot-loose Manhattan Islanders.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, June 20, 1939

## Comedians and Girls

By HERBERT DRAKE

"STREETS OF PARIS" must be very near what is meant, by and large, when you say "musical show." It has all the parts and in well balanced proportion. Its title is fraudulent, which the first chorus cheerfully admits; it is about as French as Canarsie, but it is a strutting, lusty, words-and-music show with a cock-eyed leer in its eye, a battery of inspired comedians, herds of girls, good songs and some of the handsomest costumes of the year. It stems from all the shows you've ever seen, and it has a zany pattern of renewed and streamlined burlesque acts which brings up the title "Hellsapoppin." The Shuberts have done well by the summer season if "Streets of Paris" is a herald of the musical comedies to come.

The ostensible sensation of the show is Carmen Miranda, specially imported from Brazil, but, while quite a sinuous whirlwind in her highly charged way, Miss Miranda stands back and stops wriggling while honors are carried screaming off the stage by our old friend, Bobby Clark, and by Abbott and Costello, a new team to the musical stage, who have been delving into the comic archives of the burlesque shows and rooting out the classic sketches. They are the big hit of "Streets of Paris"—falling down, pouring water into beds, playing the shell game with squashy lemons and grapefruit and dumping bushels of actual apples from the flies while the old master Bobby Clark, scurries around behind, waving his cane and blowing cigar smoke in benediction over the new variations on the ancient themes.

Miss Miranda is dark tan and shining with a personality apparently indigenous to Brazil. Whatever it is, she is wonderful to watch but the lady does not appear except once, when she sings a few monotonously fascinating chants, in Portuguese, perhaps. All the while she looks fabulously like a tropical Tallulah

rampant against a costume-ball background, but very wicked around the eyes. She does serve as a particularly apt symbol of the high stepping, hand leading speed and glitter of the show. It is highly populated with highly satisfactory girls, and is, perhaps, a little nuder than the recent trend, but the nudity is as much a matter of Irene Sharaff's stunning costumes as anything else. Figured by the square yard, it is doubtless average.

The song department is very well stocked, with "Thanks for the France," "We Live On Love," "Robert the Rone" and "Is It Possible?" among the best. The girls are well maneuvered in the dancing, and the scenery never gets in the way of the action. As for the rest, there are excellent performances by the incise Louella Gear, Jean Sablon, the straight man; Della Lind, a blond canary; and Yvonne Bouvier, an extremely able soubrette. The oddity of the evening is Dr. "Think-a-drink Hoffman," who would be a handy man to keep around. He pours anything you can name by way of alcohol out of two or three cocktail shakers. We were handed kimmel, and it was all right, almost as good as the show.

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# "The Philadelphia Story"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, March 29, 1939

## 'The Philadelphia Story,' With Katharine Hepburn, Opens at the Shubert

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

PHILIP BARRY abandons his stern probing among absolute values in "The Philadelphia Story," which opened last evening at the Shubert, and contents himself with polishing an anecdote to high luster. Alert and suave is his comedy, and touched a little with tenderness, and Miss Katharine Hepburn gives a brightly winning performance. Both Mr. Barry and Miss Hepburn seem to be back where they belong, which is fine for every one.

Mr. Barry has started with rather little. His chief character is a spirited girl of an old Philadelphia family, whose only fault is a certain inclination to put humanity on a pedestal and to be a little distant with it when it falls off. She is lovely and witty, but will not take life easily. She scorns her philandering father and her aloofness from fault has led to a divorce from her first husband. Mr. Barry takes up her affairs when she is about to marry again, this time a stalwart stuffed shirt.

Circumstances save her from this fate, aided by an inquiring journalist who is writing up Philadelphia for a magazine named "Destiny." Mr. Barry drops in a few pleasant digs at the magazine and its publisher, and leaves little doubt as to the prototypes of both. That can be chalked down as the neat ornament of satire. Wine and the summer night humanize the lady in the writer's arms and the stuffed shirt cannot believe that writers are gentlemen when ladies are intoxicated. Mr. Barry, it is pleasant to report, can. So can the still adoring first husband, and all works

out well for love.

This shines only as Mr. Barry writes it, but then it does shine. The first act crumbles a bit and during it Miss Hepburn was obviously nervous and under strain. But with the first hurdle passed, the author is at his nimblest. His dialogue flows and crackles, and softens when it should, and all the people are real and glowing. Mr. Barry's old skill at making the least consequential remark seem glossy with meaning has not waned. His deftness makes the last two acts ripple with wit. And always there is in it, underlying the dexterity, the author's tenderness toward the quipping human creatures of his imagination. "The Philadelphia Story" is not one-tenth as aspiring as "Here Come the Clowns." But it is many times as finished and satisfying a stage piece.

### 'THE PHILADELPHIA STORY'

A comedy in three acts by Philip Barry, directed by Robert B. Sinclair; designed and lighted by Robert Edmond Jones; presented on March 28, 1939, at the Shubert Theater by the Theater Guild. The cast:

|                         |                   |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Dinah Lord.....         | Lenore Lonergan   |
| Margaret Lord.....      | Vera Allen        |
| Tracy Lord.....         | Katharine Hepburn |
| Alexander Lord.....     | Dan Tobin         |
| Thomas.....             | Owen Coll         |
| William Tracy.....      | Forrest Orr       |
| Elizabeth Imbrie.....   | Shirley Booth     |
| Macaulay Connor.....    | Van Heflin        |
| George Kittredge.....   | Frank Fenton      |
| C. K. Dexter Haven..... | Joseph Cotten     |
| Edward.....             | Philip Foster     |
| Seth Lord.....          | Nicholas Joy      |
| Myrtle.....             | Myrtle Tannahill  |
| Elsie.....              | Lorraine Bates    |
| Mac.....                | Hayden Rorke      |

And Miss Hepburn brings far more than her always attractive personality to Mr. Barry's aid. She is light and quick and graceful in the role of the lady from Philadelphia, and acts with variety and often with poignancy. The mannerisms are still evident, but now they are utilized as facets in the role. There is freshness in her playing and ingenuity, and after the first act almost no rough edges.

The cast is generally admirable. Van Heflin is excellent as the journalist who is won from gruff disapproval of the privileged class to very sharp approval of one of its members. Joseph Cotten plays the discarded husband with charm and insight; Nicholas Joy gives another of his good performances as the lady's father and Forrest Orr, Shirley Booth, Frank Fenton and Vera Allen brighten the scene. Lenore Lonergan, a plump little girl, plays the part of a plump little girl with formidable and engaging forthrightness.

This is, incidentally, a Theater Guild offering. Both the Guild and Mr. Barry are taking things more easily at the moment. They are both all the better for it, too.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, March 29, 1939

## Greetings to Miss Hepburn

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IT IS pleasant to be able to report this morning that Miss Katharine Hepburn, Mr. Philip Barry and the Theater Guild are all in good form once more, following sundry misadventures here and there. Miss Hepburn, after gamely facing a lengthy barrage of heckling that would have daunted a less courageous person, has a good role and proves that she is an entrancing comedienne. Mr. Barry, who wrestled eloquently with his soul in "Here Come the Clowns" to unfortunately limited applause, returns to his familiar field of brittle light comedy with every indication of great and justifiable popular success. As for the Theater Guild, which has undergone enough suffering in the last few years to try the patience of a regiment of Japs, it has, in Mr. Barry's new play and, in particular, Miss Hepburn's admirable performance, the box-office gold mine it has needed so desperately. "The Philadelphia Story," I should add, is hardly likely to go down in my anthology of favorite comedies, but it is a lively and entertaining play, written with all of Mr. Barry's graceful wit, and it becomes one of the good shows of the season.

Of the various successes scored in connection with "The Philadelphia Story," that of Miss Hepburn is the most gratifying. Few actresses of the modern theater have been mocked and criticized so cruelly and unjustly, and now she turns upon the skeptics and the hecklers and offers one of the most enchanting performances of the season. Looking radiantly lovely and playing with humor, charm and remarkable resource, she makes the heroine of Mr. Barry's fable a believable and fascinating young woman of

character and distinction. One important requirement of the role is that the heroine should seem worth the discussion, consideration and attention that the other members of the cast bestow upon her, and in this she is completely successful. The harried and somewhat priggish Philadelphia society girl, who discovers her mind and will under the sardonic eye of an investigating journalist, somehow becomes a person of quality and character as the result of her charm, skill and forthrightness. Miss Hepburn plays with both comic and dramatic insight, and she must be placed among the important actresses of the American stage.

As for Mr. Barry's return to an earlier and more commercially successful manner, it is managed humorously, urbanely and attractively. The points that he would make are not particularly striking. A priggish girl, intolerant of the weaknesses of others, can grow warmly human only when she finds

that she, too, is capable of lapses. It is possible for a man who has risen from the masses to be a boulder and for a fellow from the best Philadelphia aristocracy to be valiant and understanding. I don't think that many of us have ever questioned the truth of either profound observation, but that is not particularly important. Neither is the fact that the author doesn't probe very deeply into human character or into the anatomy of society. He has frankly written a theatrical comedy, written it with skill and humor and good-natured sympathy and in that attractive prose style which tends to make everything he sets down so graceful. Since his play also deals with the investigation of a magazine known as "Destiny"—its publisher has another magazine called "Dine"—into the activities of a Philadelphia family, there had been hints that it would offer some pretty warm assaults on recognizable figures in the news. But Mr. Barry doesn't bother.

Miss Hepburn is, of course, the all-important central figure of the play, but the other roles are attractively acted. Van Heflin and Miss Shirley Booth portray the investigators from "Destiny" humorously and sanely, and there is a particularly good performance as the heroine's first husband by an increasingly skillful young actor named Joseph Cotten. Miss Lenore Lonergan as the kid sister, Miss Vera Allen as the mother, Nicholas Joy as the father and Forrest Orr as the uncle of the eminent Philadelphia family are helpful and Frank Fenton makes the unhelpful young man from the lower classes sufficiently caddish. Mr. Barry is more entertaining in his comic than in his serious scenes, and there is still a slight trace of that unhelpful snobishness that used to bother some of us in his earlier plays. This time, however, he manages even his own particular type of class consciousness with such unhelpful deftness that it becomes engaging, rather than annoying. He and Miss Hepburn have put the Theater Guild decidedly in their debt.

# "The Philadelphia Story"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, March 29, 1939

## Katharine Hepburn Acts in "The Philadelphia Story"

The Theatre Guild Produces Philip Barry's New Comedy  
at the Shubert

By JOHN MASON BROWN

THAT there have always been two Philip Barrys writing for our stage has long since been well-known to those who have followed Mr. Barry's double life as a dramatist. One of these has been the cosmic Mr. Barry who has fought an anguishing, often arresting, inner struggle as he has gone searching for his God in such scripts as "John," "Hotel Universe," "The Joyous Season," and this winter's "Here Come the Clowns."

The other Mr. Barry, the first to be heard from and the one his largest public has always doted upon, is the dramatist who has shown an extraordinary flair for badinage and written such charming and perceptively tearful comedies as "You and I," "White Wings," "Paris Bound," "In a Garden," "Tomorrow and Tomorrow," and "The Animal Kingdom."

It is this second Mr. Barry, the smiling one with a lump in his throat, who has tossed off "The Philadelphia Story," that play, so pleasant at times but so unimportant throughout, which can boast as its truest and most commanding virtue the fact that it brings Katharine Hepburn triumphantly back to our stage with all of her miraculous beauty and vivid fascination.

### Mr. Barry's Play

Mr. Barry's new script is not in his best comic vein. But it is often agreeable. Through it shine those qualities, literate and ingratiating, which have distinguished his better comedies. It is the work of a man, sensitive and witty, who even when he has embarked upon what proves to be something of a dra-

matist's holiday turns up bearing his special gifts.

As he relates how a rich young Philadelphia divorcee, a chill perfectionist, a married virgin who has no understanding in her heart, is awakened to love and life by a drunken incident with a writer the night before she is to marry another man, Mr. Barry has difficulty starting his fable and nods at times, in the best Greek fashion, while keeping it going. Yet when once he has established his wealthy family, and abruptly indicated that they are supposed to be on their best behavior because the privacy of their country home is being invaded by a writer and a lady photographer who have been sent to do an article about them for a magazine thinly disguised as "Destiny," Mr. Barry's play begins to show agreeable traces of his authorship.

If his comedy is not a good one; if it forces one to think back to the superiority of "Paris

Bound," which it often brings to mind, it has its commendable points, at least it passes the time, often very pleasantly. It bristles with amusing lines. It has scenes which indicate Mr. Barry's surety as a comic dramatist. It makes clear what a gay and intuitive mind is his and how polished his gift for dialogue can be. Even at its feeblest and most aimless, it is warmed by a winning sense of tolerance.

Once again Mr. Barry may be turning Congress into a cardinal, and advancing his old argument that a single transgression is no justification for a divorce between two people who really love one another. But to this he adds a welcome and timely plea to the effect that people, not classes, are what matter; that poverty does not spell virtue any more than riches necessarily spell meanness.

### The Radiant Miss Hepburn

The evening, however, is Miss Hepburn's. Mr. Barry's play at its best is no more than a nice red carpet he has unrolled for her. Although Forrest Orr as a wealthy uncle, and Nicholas Joy as a straying father, and Shirley Booth and Van Heffin as the representatives of "Destiny," and Joseph Cotten as Miss Hepburn's first husband are good enough in the Theatre Guild's production at the Shubert, it is Miss Hepburn who rates an "A" compared to Mr. Barry's "B."

Visually she brings a loveliness to our stage such as has not been seen hereabouts in years. Yet she is no impassive beauty. Her finely chiseled face is a volatile mask. If it is difficult to take one's eyes off of her, it is because she is also blessed with an extraordinary personality.

Slim and lovely as she is, Miss Hepburn likewise possesses a voice which in her emotional scenes can be sheer velvet. Although in years she may at times be misjudged as she moves around the stage with an awkward grace, she has grown a lot as a legitimate actress since the days of "The Lake." Mr. Barry may not have given her much to do except to be herself (as if that were not enough) until the third act is reached. But then she meets the acting demands of the script admirably. Indeed, not since she appeared in "Morning Glory," "Little Women," and "Alice Adams" on the screen have I, at least, seen Miss Hepburn display her unique gifts to better advantage than she does in Mr. Barry's "The Philadelphia Story." She is a play in herself, and one that is urgently worth seeing.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, March 29, 1939

## Katharine Hepburn Appearing in Philip Barry's 'The Philadelphia Story' for the Theatre Guild

By BROOKS ATKINSON

CONSIDERABLE sustained purring ought to be audible around town this morning. For the Theatre Guild, Katharine Hepburn and Philip Barry have all come together in a gay and sagacious comedy entitled "The Philadelphia Story," put on at the Shubert last evening. None of them has been rich in luck these past few seasons. But Mr. Barry is writing now in the light vein that becomes him and about the people most congenial to his talent. Miss Hepburn plays up to him with the flexibility of a professional stage actress. As for the Theatre Guild, which has been afflicted with disaster longer than one cares to think, it has staged "The Philadelphia Story" with the taste and the sheen of better years—direction by Robert Sinclair, settings by Robert Edmond Jones. Every one should be feeling fine this morning.

Although Mr. Barry always keeps within safe distance of the drawing room, he has a moral that saves his comedy from pure frivolity. He is looking for the human being beneath the cool, arrogant virtue of a daughter of the upper classes. She ruthlessly holds every one up to the austere standards she has set for herself. Having made one bad marriage to a man unworthy of her pride, she is now on the point of trying again with a self-made man of commerce who is getting on in the world. But a number of things intervene just before the ceremony—some bru-

tal truth-telling by her first husband and her father and a wild affair with a tough-minded magazine writer who knows the facts of life. In the end the girl with the good mind and the disciplined body also acquires the understanding heart of a woman, and the marriage hastily turns into a reunion with the husband of her first choice.

Probably it is misleading to describe "The Philadelphia Story" as a study in the moral codes of human beings. For Mr. Barry's style is buoyant; his dialogue is silken and comic and his characters are witty, worldly folks with a reticent feeling about solemn topics. By an ingenious turn of story-telling, Mr. Barry has made his narrative a full one. To

give it a little contemporary scope, he introduces two magazine investigators who might be representing Fortune if Mr. Barry did not specifically call it "Destiny." It is the genius of the comedy of manners to spin through the lives of recognizable characters with complete plausibility. It must be confessed that "The Philadelphia Story" is a little too convenient in its conclusion, and just a trifle arch as well. But at worst that is matter of personal opinion, and at best it is only the ghost of a flaw in a spirited and gossamer dance of comedy with just enough idea to season it pleasantly.

Certainly Mr. Barry has written Miss Hepburn's ideal part. It has whisked away the monotony and reserve that have kept her acting in the past within a very small compass. As the daughter of the rich she plays with grace, jauntiness and warmth—moving across the stage like one who is liberated from self-consciousness and taking a pleasure in acting that the audience can share. Mr. Sinclair has for several years been one of our finest directors. He is very much up to the mark this time, and all the actors give beguiling performances. It would be hard to improve upon Van Heffin's honest and solid description of a tough-minded writer, and of Joseph Cotten's uphill fight with a part that looks forbidding in the early scenes. As the brat of the family, Lenore Lonergan of a famous theatrical tribe, acts with a stout sort of humor that suits her groaning little figure. Let us also say something appreciative of Frank Fenton, Vera Allen, Shirley Forrester Orr and Nicholas Joy, who help to round out a joyful evening.

For this is an occasion that deserves appreciation. When the Theatre Guild, Miss Hepburn and Mr. Barry are at the top of the same time, all is for the best in the best of all possible Broadway. Although the comedy of manners has almost been lost in the dark whirl of world affairs, it is still a source of unholly delight when experts write, act and produce it.



# "The Philadelphia Story"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, March 29, 1939

## Nice Welcome for Kay Hepburn In "The Philadelphia Story"

"The Philadelphia Story," comedy by Philip Barry. Produced by the Theatre Guild at the Shubert Theatre, New York, March 28, 1939.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THE news is on the cheering side this morning. It concerns Katharine Hepburn's return to the scene of a stage defeat several years ago, when she wasn't quite ready to capitalize her motion picture successes, and a nice welcome at the applauding hands of a friendly and favorably impressed audience at the Shubert Theatre last night.

It concerns, too, the return of Philip Barry to the sort of job he takes least interest in doing in the theatre, probably because it is the sort of job he does best. That would be the writing of bright comedy lines and the incisive picturing of such trails and humans as he has observed in the

Tory set. The combination reveals Miss Hepburn in Mr. Barry's "The Philadelphia Story," and also what promises to be the first hit of the Theatre Guild's season.

### A Hepburn Part

Miss Hepburn happens to be that type of actress who has to be cast. Neither by experience nor by temperament is she fitted to play any role into which she might be tossed. To her good fortune in the present instance Mr. Barry has fitted her about as perfectly as she can be fitted in this story of a "virgin goddess" of the Philadelphia suburbs, out where the Drexels and the Biddies live. A cold beauty waiting to be awakened; an inhibited romantic with all the complexes of a spoiled daughter of the privileged class; a case history probably well known to both Mr. Barry and Sigmund Freud.

Tracy Lord, of the Philadelphia Lords, has married C. K. Dexter Haven and divorced

him when he, resenting her chilling attitude toward the comforting virtues of domesticity, takes to liquor.

A little while later she has taken up with a handsome snob of the mines named Kittredge and is about to marry him. One of the calendar paper social gossip weeklies sends a reporter and a camera woman to cover the wedding. They are injected into the house by Tracy's brother, who hopes to divert their attention from Father Lord's affair with a Broadway actress.

### No Wedding Bells

Tracy, already a little shaken in her urge for Kittredge, finds herself suddenly bowled over by Connor, the fascinating reporter. At the end of a pre-wedding party, at which the champagne flows like ginger ale, she and Connor go for a dip in the pool.

Tracy always had been an uncertain champagne drinker. The last time she drank a

lot of it she took off all her clothes and went out on the roof to salute the moon.

Now the wedding is threatened. Kittredge takes his frock coat and goes home. But if you want to know whether Tracy married Connor, or went back to her first husband, you'll have to ask Mr. Barry or see the play. I'm no tattletale.

This, I think, is a fine Hepburn role. Sufficiently unconventional to give her somewhat different personality from that in which to expand. Sufficiently sympathetic, as it builds, to bring her closer than she might ordinarily get to her audience.

### Nice Work

She was a little overanxious to do her best last night, and therefore less spontaneous and natural than she will be from tonight on. But she slighted no point of advantage, save one last-act laugh, which perhaps she has not been getting on the road, with the line: "Am I so unattractive?"

It was a nice, honest, competent performance and the audience, as before reported, was ever so happy to remain after the curtain to tell her so. Which should make this a much brighter morning than was that morning in 1932, after she had played the heroine of "The Lake."

The support and production are of Guild standard. Van Heflin, again no communist, but again "a pin feather on the left wing," as he was in "The End of Summer," plays Connor with his customary forthrightness and good sense.

Joseph Cotten is the plausible ex-husband, Frank Fenton the unpopular fiancé, Nicholas Joy, Vera Allen and Forrest Orr have short parts. Shirley Booth is a smart magazine girl and little Lenore Lonergan keeps a smart child from being too smart.

Nice setting by Robert Edmond Jones. Good direction by Robert Sinclair.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, March 29, 1939

## "Philadelphia Story" Fits Katharine Hepburn

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

FORSAKING the mysticism with which he has lately been experimenting, Philip Barry has returned to the field of polite and gay drawing-room and front-porch comedy, and in doing so has provided Katharine Hepburn with her most charming vehicle of recent years.

His new play is called "Philadelphia Story," and it was given its New York premiere last night at the Shubert Theater as the fourth production of the Theater Guild this season.

The dialogue is as smart as Mr. Barry knows how to make it, which means that it is rapid, sparkling and rich in wit. And it also means that sometimes you are constrained to wonder whether there are people who chatter so brilliantly, or whether it is just Philip Barry prompting them.

Among the innumerable things about the new comedy for which I am profoundly thankful, however, is that at last we have a play about the down-trodden rich that doesn't make every last one of them out to be either fiendishly cunning or hopelessly degenerate. It appears to be Mr. Barry's idea that plutocrats, despite the curse of gold, have moments both of lucidity and decency. There is, among all the delightful characters the author imagines into life, only one who is at all distasteful, and he is a product of hard work and ambition and clean living. The

sort of chap, in short, about whom you are inclined to say "ugh!"

### Rest of Family Pleasant

The rest of the family pictured in "The Philadelphia Story" are pleasant people, despite the handicap of wealth and despite occasional deviations from evangelical behavior.

"The Philadelphia Story" is supposed to be the revelation made to the staff writer for "Fortune Magazine," thinly disguised as "Destiny," who has gone to the city of Brotherly Love to get material for an expose of the industrial and social life there. His most astonishing discovery is that decency

is not a matter of class, but of individuals and that many a stuffed shirt conceals an honest heart.

Macaulay Connor, the reporter, arrives fortuitously in the home of the Lord family on the day before the eldest daughter of the house, Tracy Lord, is to embark on her second marriage. Circumstances, to some of which Connor contributes, awaken Tracy to the lack of desirability on the part of her new partner, and to the extreme desirability of her ex-husband.

Miss Hepburn is Tracy and the part of the confused, willful, rather coldly egotistical girl fits her magnificently. If, as seems possible, the role was written for her, Mr. Barry has clothed her exquisitely. But Miss Hepburn herself responds vividly to the part, giving it a superbly real interpretation.

### Cast Is Admirable

The cast is in every respect admirable. A particularly appealing personality, an attractive and skilful actor, is Joseph Cotten, who has been borrowed from the Mercury Theater to play the role of the ex-husband, Mr. Cotten has an easy stage presence and an unaffected graciousness of manner, and he makes his character human.

Van Heflin was also well-cast as the inquiring reporter, playing it with rare restraint, considering the almost uncontrollable desire on the part of the theater to picture writing men as cads.

An extremely heavy piece of work, for a child is given to little Lenore Lonergan, as a 10-year-old infant who is half brat and half good fairy, and Miss Lonergan seems something like a prodigy. She acts like a veteran. The play is, however, Miss Hepburn's. It gives her the opportunity to display her undeniable intelligence, and she accepts it confidently, enthusiastically and gracefully. There is no profound moral lesson in "The Philadelphia Story," nor is its comedy bold or clever, but it is a good, healthy piece of work, and it is clear as crystal.

# "The Little Foxes"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, February 16, 1939

## "The Little Foxes" Taut Drama Of a Ruthless Southern Family

"The Little Foxes," drama by Lillian Hellman. Produced by Herman Shumlin at the National Theatre, New York, Feb. 15, 1939.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

LILLIAN HELLMAN refuses to compromise. When she writes a drama she hews to the line, and lets her audience find its sympathetic emotional compensations, if any, where it can. She did this, you may recall, with the vibrant "The Children's Hour." Also with the less effective "Days to Come."

She repeats the formula with "The Little Foxes," shown last night at the National, with Tallulah Bankhead starred.

This is the story of a pathetically unlovely family of one-time Southern aristocrats. These would be the Hubbards, and when we meet them they have come upon evil days of grasping greed and family bickering.

There is a suggestion, too, that there has been a bit of unhealthy inbreeding back in grandfather's and grandmother's day, which has weakened the breed and developed a neurotic or two.

But, granting that her people are more frequently unpleasant than pleasant, Miss Hellman's sense of drama is strong and true. You might not like "The Little Foxes," but I'll guarantee that you will be at least a little fascinated by its family exposure. I was.

### At the End

True, I am not greatly pleased with inconclusive drama, however well written or well acted. I prefer my stage stories to arrive definitely at a conclusion, and by choice a

hopeful conclusion. Not necessarily happy, but hopeful.

"The Little Foxes" avoids the issue. Miss Bankhead's role is that of Regina Giddens, wife of Horace Giddens, sister of Benjamin and Oscar Hubbard. A ruthless, cruel, financially grasping trio, these Hubbards.

While Regina's unloved husband is in Johns Hopkins with a weak heart they conspire to get him into a mill-expanding deal with a Chicago syndicate. When they bring him home and reveal the plan he refuses to take a hand.

He has lost interest in worldly gains. He has lost interest also in his wife. He knows he is going to die and is concerned only for the future of his young daughter.

The brothers find a way to help themselves

to the sick man's securities. He discovers the theft, plans a new will and dies before he can execute it. The wife is left with such power as her knowledge of her brothers' guilt gives her. The daughter has no more than the sympathetic loyalty of an old colored servant to sustain her.

### Good Directing

Matching Miss Hellman's sense of drama is Herman Shumlin's sense of effective direction in a play of this sort. He manages to hold the story of "The Little Foxes" taut from its opening scenes to somewhere near its close. Only the last act moves indecisively and haltingly toward its finish.

Otherwise there is a feeling of impending tragedy overshadowing the action that makes for close attention and keen audience interest. And a nice handling of incidental scenes.

Miss Bankhead, with a certain relish for heavy scenes, plays the crafty and cruel Regina with consistently sustained effectiveness. Patricia Collinge, cast as an abused neurotic, wife to one of the ruthless brothers, stirs a natural sympathy that draws the audience to her. She has not had so good a part in a long time.

The brothers are admirably played by Charles Dingle (the Benjamin) and Carl Benton Reid (the Oscar). Frank Conroy is splendidly stanch as the nobler husband, dying with a fine theatrical command of a good actor's technique without overdoing the opportunity.

Florence Williams is nicely sympathetic as the daughter, and there are short parts well played by Dan Duryea, Lee Baker, Abigail Mitchell and John Marriott.

The serviceable setting is by Howard Bay, and the authentic 1900 costumes by Aline Bernstein.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, February 16, 1939

## Tallulah Bankhead Appearing in Lillian Hellman's Drama of the South, 'The Little Foxes'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

AS A theatrical story-teller Lillian Hellman is biting and expert. In "The Little Foxes," which was acted at the National last evening, she thrusts a bitter story straight to the bottom of a bitter play. As compared with "The Children's Hour," which was her first notable play, "The Little Foxes" will have to take second rank. For it is a deliberate exercise in malice—melodramatic rather than tragic, none too fastidious in its manipulation of the stage and presided over by a Pinero frown of fustian morality. But out of greed in a malignant Southern family of 1900 she has put together a vibrant play that works and that bestows viable parts on all the members of the cast. None of the new plays in which Tallulah Bankhead has acted here has given her such sturdy support and such inflammable material. Under Herman Shumlin's taut direction Miss Bankhead plays with great directness and force, and Patricia Collinge also distinguishes herself with a remarkable performance. "The Little Foxes" can act and is acted.

It would be difficult to find a more malignant gang of petty robber barons than Miss Hellman's chief characters. Two brothers and a sister in a small Southern town are consumed with a passion to exploit the earth. Forming a partnership with a Chicago capitalist, they propose to build a cotton factory

in the South, where costs are cheap and profits high. The Chicago end of the deal is sound. But Miss Hellman is telling a sordid story of how the brothers and the sister destroy each other with their avarice and cold hatred. They crush the opposition set up by a brother-in-law of higher principles; they rob him and hasten his death. But they also outwit each other in sharp dealing and they bargain their mean souls away.

It is an inhuman tale. Miss Hellman takes a dextrous playwright's advantage of the abominations it contains. Her first act is a masterpiece of skillful exposition. Under the gentility of a social occasion she suggests with

admirable reticence the evil of her conspirators. When she lets loose in the other two acts she writes with melodramatic abandon, plotting torture, death and thievery like the author of an old-time thriller. She has made her drama air-tight; it is a knowing job of construction, deliberate and self-contained. In the end she tosses in a speech of social significance, which is no doubt sincere. But "The Little Foxes" is so cleverly contrived that it lacks spontaneity. It is easier to accept as an adroitly designed theatre piece than as a document in the study of humanity.

One practical advantage of a theatre piece is the opportunities it supplies to the actors. In a perfectly cast performance, none of them fumbles his part. Sometimes our Tallulah walks buoyantly through a part without much feeling for the whole design. But as the malevolent lady of "The Little Foxes" she plays with superb command of the entire character—sparing of the showy side, constantly aware of the poisonous spirit within. As a neurotic victim of circumstances, Miss Collinge also drags the whole truth out of a character, and acts it with extraordinary lightness and grace. Frank Conroy plays the part of a tired man of the house with patient strength of character. Florence Williams is singularly touching in the part of a bewildered, apprehensive daughter of the family. There are also vivid characterizations in the other parts by Charles Dingle, Abbie Mitchell, Carl Benton Reid, Dan Duryea, Lee Baker and John Marriott.

Howard Bay has provided a setting that conveys the dark stealthiness of the story, and Aline Bernstein has designed suitable costumes for a period narrative. As for the title, it comes from the Bible: "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines; for our vines have tender grapes." Out of rapacity, Miss Hellman has made an adult horror-play. Her little foxes are wolves that eat their own kind.

# "The Little Foxes"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, February 16, 1939

## Dixie

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

MISS HELLMAN'S new play is a grim, bitter and merciless study; a drama more honest, more pointed and more brilliant than even her triumphant previous work, "The Children's Hour." In outline "The Little Foxes" might be called a psychological horror story, so virulent is its contemplation of a hateful and rapacious Southern family at the turn of the century. By its implications, though, it is far more than that. Through its thoughtful indignation, it becomes a scornful and heartfelt parable of the rise of the industrial South in all its ruthlessness, its savage sense of realism and its fine scorn for the older trappings of Confederate romanticism. With Ibsenian directness, it contemplates the relentless emergence of a new industrialism from the ashes of a sentimental past, the coming to power of a social order that lifted itself from the ranks of the one-time poor whites and used the emotional code of the old South only as a mask for its ascent. All of this Miss Hellman achieves in a quiet play that never leaves the living room of a family home. Here is another fine and important American drama.

Although its implications are so widespread "The Little Foxes" is essentially concerned with the story of one family, the Hubbards, allied against the outside world and hating each other bitterly. It is the tale of how the Hubbards schemed to bring a cotton factory to their home town, a factory that was to prosper not only because the cotton fields would be so near, but because the whites and the Negroes would work so cheaply and could be driven to work for even less by the proper use of racial differences. It is the story of pious, sardonic old Ben Hubbard, the head of the clan, who sneered at his brother and his sister as he did at all the rest of the world; of brother Oscar, petty, mean, cruel, a tyrannical persecutor of his gentle, foolish, aristocratic little wife; of his son Leo, thief and coward. Chiefly, though, it is the

story of the beautiful, hard, realistic Regina, sly and more cruel than either of her brothers, and of the hatred between her and her sensitive, understanding, stricken husband. The account of Regina's rise to power might, as I have suggested, be merely a psychological horror tale were the characters not all so real, so impressive and so understandingly drawn. Every portrait in "The Little Foxes" is mordant and masterly.

Perhaps it should be reported that the title of the play is taken from the Bible; from the Song of Songs, in fact. The quotation is "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines; for the vines have tender grapes." The South, says Miss Hellman, was filled at the opening of the century with such little foxes as the Hubbards, who were building their industrial empire upon the wreckage of an older and more graceful, but infinitely less guileful civilization. The most sympathetic character in the drama is a representative of this older land, this Dixie of song and romance, but, although Miss Hellman sympathizes with her gentleness and her innocence, she realizes that there is no intelligence or sense of realism in her and that she must perish. The one hope she finds is in a newer generation that might combine a trace of the old

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, February 16, 1939

## Decay of the South Hellman Play Theme

Tallulah Bankhead Gives Superb Performance in Leading Role of Fine Drama, "The Little Foxes."

By GEORGE ROSS

THE National's stage last night was charged with a play of high dramatic voltage. . . . The play is "The Little Foxes" and the electricity was provided by Lillian Hellman, who wrote it with the kind of sincere fury that she unleashed in "The Children's Hour;" by Herman Shumlin, who produced and staged it tautly, acutely and with great dexterity; by Tallulah Bankhead, who at last has her glistening teeth in a role that meets her histrionic talent and makes the most of the meaty dish; and by the most superior cast of supporting players of the season.

This is the play Miss Hellman has been expected to write since "The Children's Hour" struck Broadway with thunderous impact since she lived down the wishy-washiness of the short-lived "Days to Come." For here she puts together a harrowing horror story, gives it plenty of social significance and holds the intense interest of what are bound to be deeply engrossed audiences.

### Aristocrats' Decay

In "The Little Foxes"—Dorothy Parker culled the title from the bit in "Song of Songs" ("the little foxes who spoil the vines")—she is ruthlessly depicting the decay of the Southern "aristocrats" at the turn of the century. They who "spoil the vines" are the

greedy, crooked, petty, grasping remains of the South after the civil war. They are the ones who exploited the country below the Mason-Dixon line for all the good, hard cash it was worth, replacing black slavery with economic slavery for black and white, defacing their countryside with grim soot from mills that were rapidly greased with the moneybags from the North, blind to all the codes of human decency.

She is recalling all this in a tense narrative which has that drive and energy that Daphne Du Maurier, for example, got into her relentless and harrowing novel "Rebecca." Her narrative revolves around a particularly virtuous pack of "little foxes," of which Miss Bankhead as Regina Giddens, is the greediest despoiler. For Regina puts all decency behind

### "THE LITTLE FOXES"

A play in three acts, by Lillian Hellman; designs by Howard Bay; costumes by Aline Bernstein; staged and presented by the National Theater on February 15, 1939, by Herman Shumlin. The cast: Addie . . . . . Abbie Mitchell  
Cal . . . . . John Marriott  
Birdie Hubbard . . . . . Patricia Collinge  
Oscar Hubbard . . . . . Carl Benton Reid  
Leo Hubbard . . . . . Dan Duryea  
Regina Giddens . . . . . Tallulah Bankhead  
William Marshall . . . . . Lee Baker  
Benjamin Hubbard . . . . . Charles Dingle  
Alexandra Giddens . . . . . Florence Williams  
Horace Giddens . . . . . Frank Conroy

romanticism with a great deal of the new hardness, and above all things the playwright cannot stand those who would look on at the rise of this social and industrial tyranny and attempt no fight against it. But Miss Hellman is not much concerned with optimistic signs of the future. Her play is all scornful, savage bitterness mixed with a literary artist's understanding of character.

Playing the central character of the drama, the ruthless Regina, Miss Tallulah Bankhead offers the finest performance of her local career, a portrayal that is honest, merciless and completely understanding. At last Miss Bankhead has a role and a play worthy of her. Equally fine, though, is Miss Patricia Collinge's gentle, sympathetic portrait of the helpless, slightly silly daughter of Confederate aristocracy. There are splendid portrayals, too, by that invariably skillful actor, Charles Dingle, as the head of the Hubbard clan; by Carl Benton Reid, as the weaker brother, by Dan Duryea as the son and by Frank Conroy as the dying husband who hates his wife so implacably. Lesser roles are well managed by Miss Florence Williams as the daughter of the dubious heroine and by Miss Abbie Mitchell and John Marriott as the family servants. The settings, direction and costumes are excellent. "The Little Foxes" is an important and distinguished play, properly acted, and it is a convincing proof of Miss Hellman's standing as a dramatist.

her to vent her hate upon her estranged husband, who is swiftly dying of a heart ailment, and upon her two brothers, who hate her with equal ferocity but who are her conspirators in a money-grubbing enterprise.

This enterprise is a new cotton mill in the town. A money lord from the North has offered to put up one-half of the investment if Regina and her brothers will provide the other half. The plan is balked when Regina's husband holds back an equal share. He is going to die anyway, and this is his vengeance upon a wife who has had nothing but contempt for him. And, meanwhile, no chicanery is too big or small to be perpetrated upon each other. Nor is Regina above murder when she fails to bring the dying man a life-prolonging bottle of digitalis.

### Melodramatic Plot

Miss Hellman is narrating this grim plot in a melodramatic fashion and if some of the tricks she uses to heighten the intensity are as obvious as the ruses for suspense in, say, an Agatha Christie novel they command the playgoer's undivided attention. Directing the drama, Mr. Shumlin has been equally unrelenting, pervading the stage with steady anxiety.

This is one of the best roles of Miss Bankhead's career and she is releasing all the tricks she uses to heighten the intensity are as obvious as the ruses for suspense in, say, an Agatha Christie novel they command the playgoer's undivided attention. Directing the drama, Mr. Shumlin has been equally unrelenting, pervading the stage with steady anxiety.

She is in superb company. Patricia Collinge rightfully drew an ovation for a fine performance as a helpless victim of the South's deterioration, and as the rapacious pair of brothers Charles Dingle and Carl Benton Reid fully reflect the vicious import of Miss Hellman's theme. Frank Conroy is superb as the invalid husband and the contributions by Dan Duryea, Lee Baker and Florence Williams are worthy of being singled out. The two Negro players in the play, Abbie Mitchell and John Marriott, are way above just being good.

Miss Hellman's new play about clashing wills and passions has all the excitement of an absorbing drama.



# "The Little Foxes"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, February 16, 1939

## Lillian Hellman's "The Little Foxes" Opens at the National Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

MISS LILLIAN HELLMAN has a sharp eye for the unpleasant in the human species and an accl contempt for the lower greeds of men and women. She displays the one and works off the other in "The Little Foxes," which was admirably acted last evening at the National Theater by a cast which Miss Tallulah Bankhead heads and in which Miss Patricia Collinge creates, in a few moments of vivid playing, one of the least forgettable character portraits of many months.

Miss Clare Boothe flings jibes at people she dislikes. Miss Hellman anatomizes with the thoroughness of the outraged and the merciless. Her victims on this occasion richly deserves her scorn. They are two brothers and a sister of the South in 1900; they are greedy people on the make, selfish and hard and making no bones of murder if it serves their turn. The men have made comfortable fortunes by trickery and cheating. Now Miss Hellman catches them as they grab at their big chance. Their big chance is to share in the building of a cotton mill so that they can make bigger fortunes by defrauding their competitors and their employees. And they are out to get the money for their building.

Before they get it they have woven an intricate plot of chicanery. The three of them

are fighting the world and each other, united only by greed and selfishness. The husband of the sister is their chief victim. He is a dying man and they hound him to death. His wife finishes the job by refusing to give him the medicine which will prolong his life. They cheat and thieve and are always extremely real and extremely unlikely. They drive one silly, touching woman to secret drinking and a young girl into flight and revolt. They are all the little foxes, "the little foxes that spoil the vines."

And this makes, for the most part, an absorbing and convincing study of mankind in

its lower forms. The intricacy of the plot, barely suggested here, makes some passages static. Now and then the plot touches melodrama, but touches it effectively. Miss Hellman has had a little last act trouble, as she did in "The Children's Hour." Toward the end the movement falters and the pivotal character, played by Miss Bankhead—the crafty sister—loses slightly out of focus. But it is generally shifting and motive drama.

It is not more than that, I think, because the theme of the play somehow remains secondary and vague. Miss Hellman no doubt means that the greedy and unprincipled will inherit the earth if they are not watched. But what she says is that Oscar and Benjamin Hubbard and Regina Giddens, who lived in a small town in the South in 1900, were despicable people. She is quite right about that, as she ought to be, having invented them with shrewdness and perspicacity. But she seems to me to have failed to make their case anything but a special one, with the result that her play has something of the character of an intricate, if interesting, anecdote.

Miss Hellman has given Miss Bankhead something substantial to work on, and that is a lot. Miss Bankhead, using few of the old tricks and relying instead upon insight, does a very fine job with the abashing Regina; makes her hard and vicious and rather frightening, as the author intended, and always authentic in the grain. Miss Collinge's performance creates the whole life of a weak and touching woman, and is a small masterpiece of portraiture. Frank Conroy, Charles Dingle and Dan Duryea complete sharp pictures of pleasant and unpleasant men and Miss Florence Williams acts the role of Regina's daughter with quiet perception. Abbie Mitchell and John Marriott are also excellent in a play which is steadily interesting and almost, but never quite, more.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, February 16, 1939

## "The Little Foxes" Opens At the National Theatre

Tallulah Bankhead Plays a Highly Unsympathetic Role With an Authentic Southern Accent.

By WILLELLA WALDORF

TALLULAH BANKHEAD, who is a native of Alabama and therefore the possessor of a genuine Southern accent, appeared at the National Theatre last night as the star of a new play of the South by Lillian Hellman, entitled "The Little Foxes," but if you are conjuring up thrilling pictures of the hunt, with Miss Bankhead and her supporting cast in elegant riding kit, forbear! Miss Hellman, on the advice, we understand, of no less a personage than Dorothy Parker, gleaned her title from the Bible, the Song of Solomon, in fact: "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes."

Lillian Hellman was the author of "The Children's Hour," an interesting play that would have been more convincing had it not been done in modern clothes. Miss Hellman's latest opus is definitely a "period" piece. The scene, which never changes through the three acts, is the living room of the Giddens in a small Southern town. The time, 1900. The author apparently set out to paint a sordid, bitter and occasionally harrowing picture of the ruthless grasping in this world who let nothing stand in their way on the march to wealth and power.

Benjamin and Oscar Hubbard and their sister, Regina Hubbard Giddens, are out to get rich at any price, and when a big deal comes their way, needing a mere \$75,000 from Regina's ailing husband to start the wheels of industry moving in their narrow little community, they put on an act that needs only the addition of curled mustaches and a few hisses from the audience to qualify as something straight out of Boucicault. As the Feminine Fury of the piece, Miss Bankhead manages to escape the peril of falling into a caricature of a gay nineties villainess, but even so, there were times last night when we were uncomfortably aware that Regina's machinations smacked a bit of Blanche Bates in "Diplomacy," with over-

tones from some of Ibsen's dourer heroines. It used to be the papers. In "The Little Foxes" it's "the bonds," the Union Pacific bonds that belong to Regina's banker husband, which the dastardly brothers get their spineless son and nephew to steal from the safe deposit box. The husband, poor fellow, is dying of heart disease, and to say that his end is definitely hastened by his demon of a wife is not overstating the case. Hate is rampant in the Giddens household, and the bawling Hubbards are the cause of it all.

### Patricia Collinge as Birdie

Benjamin Hubbard, the elder brother, has mercifully spared some poor creature the terrible fate of becoming his wife, but Oscar's pitiful little woman is Birdie, married for her money. Birdie is fluttery and light minded and harmless, and in a touching scene, after imbibing too much elderberry wine, Birdie confesses that she never had a happy day in twenty years, that she hates her own son, that her husband beats her, and that she drinks a good deal, all alone. As played last night by Patricia Collinge, this turned out to be a pretty devastating moment and the audience saluted Miss Collinge's exit with an ovation so prolonged that we began to wonder if it expected her

to return and do it all over again, the way they do in musical comedies.

Birdie had no reprise of her last number, however, for the Hubbards moved. In at this point and proceeded to seethe into each other's throats, and the curtain fell with Regina triumphantly riding the crest of the wave, her hated husband safely dead upstairs, her snaky brothers eating out of her hand lest she get nasty about the bonds. One cheering note was sounded at the very end when the daughter of the house rose up and poured forth a declaration of independence from all the Hubbards stood for, but Miss Hellman caused somebody to remark prophetically that the whole country was full of Hubbards and that they would soon be ruling the land in their own vicious fashion.

### An Odor of Grease Paint

Not a pretty play. "The Little Foxes" nor yet a shattering one. Though Herman Shumlin has given it the benefit of a helpful production, and the cast is most capable, an odor of grease paint and canvas scenery pervades the drama.

Frank Conroy as the husband, Florence Williams as the daughter, Lee Baker as a rich Chicagoan, and Abbie Mitchell and John Marriott as the sympathetic colored retainers, made up the anti-Hubbard contingent, led by Miss Collinge. All did valiant work. Miss Collinge's portrait of Birdie, in fact, is in the nature of a little masterpiece.

The Hubbards—Charles Dingle, Carl Benton Reid and Dan Duryea—struggled manfully against the persistent danger of becoming mere Simon Legrees. Bring in a whip and a blood-hound, and you never know what might happen some evening at the National. As it was last night we should not have been unduly surprised had one of the Hubbards advanced to the footlights and sneered: "Aha, me proud beauty!"

It must be confessed that we have been putting off mentioning Miss Bankhead's part in the proceedings as long as possible. Tallulah Bankhead is one of this department's favorite actresses. It is our opinion that some day she is going to reach Broadway in a play that gives her a real part, and she is going to knock whole audiences into the aisles. Even in the dreary get-up of the 1900's, Miss Bankhead possesses glamour on the stage. Her acting has tremendous authority and true feeling. What she saw in this role and this play to attract her we don't know. She dutifully makes the character just as hard and unpleasant as the author obviously intended it to be. Miss Bankhead has never had a first-class vehicle since her return from London. We haven't given up hoping that she will eventually find one.

# "Hellzapoppin"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, September 23, 1938

## 'Hellzapoppin,' a Rowdy Revue, Is Offered at the Forty-sixth Street Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

AS MUCH bedlam as one theater can reasonably be expected to hold was created at the Forty-sixth Street last evening by a largish troupe of performers, most of them refugees from radio and almost all of them armed with blank-cartridge revolvers. People ran up and down the aisles shouting, a detached female roamed the auditorium calling out for "Oscar," and a perplexed gentleman rolled around the stage all evening in a strait-jacket.

This small segment of chaos is described by its originators as "Hellzapoppin," which seems to describe it pretty well. Almost everything else is poppin, too. Balloons burst from time to time, and on one occasion the audience is showered with beans. The boxes are almost constantly in use by performers and apparitions and there's no doubt the whole business will keep you awake, and jumpy. There is nothing static about this show, it spends most of its time exploding in your ears.

This certainly does not provide a soothing evening, nor the privacy one is accustomed to in the quiet of the orchestra seats. It does, however, provide a good bit of pretty hysterical fun and a fair share of good vaude-

ville acts. There is a trick cyclist in it, and several good card tricks and Olsen and Johnson of the radio, who not only got the affair together but act in it as masters of ceremony and comedians in chief.

They joke and mug, often comically, and join in threatening the audience. Now and then they sing, too. Walter Nilsson, an old vaudevillian, rides one-wheeled bicycles, and also a gadget which has two feet—he has also a bicycle with square wheels. Four colored boys called the Charlotteers sing a me-

### 'HELLZAPOPPIN'

A revue in two acts; music and lyrics by Sammy Fain and Charles Tobias; presented at the Forty-sixth Street Theater on September 22, 1938, by Olsen and Johnson. The cast includes Olsen and Johnson, Barto and Mann, the Radio Rogues, Hal Sherman, Ray Kinney, the Aloha Maids, Bettyne and Beverly Crane, the Charlotteers, Theo Hardeen, Walter Nilsson, the Starlings, Reed, Dean and Reed, Shirley Wayne, Whitey's Steppers, Bergh and Moore, Roberta and Ray, Hardeen, and many others.

lodious, and oddly argumentative, song about Lincoln, and the three Radio Rogues do imitations of people on the radio, about most of whom this department knows virtually nothing. Two young sopranos sing, while Bettyne and Beverly Crane, pretty youngsters from the movies, dance in a sprightly fashion. Hal Sherman dances, too, as do three little maids from Hawaii, and four white pigeons, left over from one of the parlor tricks, thoughtfully pace the stage.

When this tends to quiet down, as often enough it does, Mr. Olsen or Mr. Johnson fires off a pistol, or a clown saunters into the audience or an orang-utan appears in a stage box—never an idle moment, for a quiet one. Something going on all the time, and a pretty chorus to boot.

There is no way I can think of to sum it up—it is rowdy and confused and uneven, and does produce, particularly at first, excited merriment. It is cheerfully free of revue staidness; the music is just a pleasant noise and the sketches have more dash than wit. It is an agreeable enough hurly-burly, but no place to take jumpy nerves.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, September 23, 1938

## "Hellzapoppin" Reaches The Forty-sixth Street

Messrs. Olsen and Johnson Stage a Revue Which Begins Well and Ends Badly

By JOHN MASON BROWN

"HELLZAPOPPIN"! For the first hilarious half-hour last night it seemed as if this were really true. The Forty-sixth Street Theatre was a madhouse for that length of time. Pandemonium reigned. Pistols were popping all over the place. Bombs were exploding. Lunacy was rampant.

Crazy newsreels disclosed Mr. Roosevelt, Hitler, and Mussolini indorsing (sometimes in strange dialects) the Messrs. Olsen's and Johnson's new revue. The Seven Dwarfs competed with the new tenants of Krum Elbow for domination of the stage. The boxes bulged with stooges. The aisles were filled with "plants"—a woman who kept calling for Oscar, a ticket scalper who warned that good seats could still be had for "I Married an Angel," and mysterious beings who in a sudden moment of darkness pretended to drop spiders upon the necks of playgoers.

Everything was topsy-turvy. Nothing made sense. Vaudeville seemed to have come back to life in a hypomantic form—vaudeville combined with burlesque and touched with moonshine. Then suddenly "Hellzapoppin" went dead and died a terrible death. It died

young and in painful convulsions, the victim of its own energy.

### And Sudden Death

It started off by being madder than any of Rube Goldberg's inventions, but it exploded soon after it had been cranked. It gave out of fuel. It jostled its passengers into a coma. It shook itself to pieces. All too soon it became apparent that, though it had set off at a terrific speed, it was going nowhere. From

then on it remained stationary. It sputtered and shook every now and then. But it had long since ceased to operate. One was as delighted to leave it as one has been overjoyed to greet it. It ended up by giving its audiences as bad a time as it had given the rabbit and the pigeons included in its cast.

The truth is that Olsen and Johnson seem to be better gag men than comics. Although their nonsensical ideas are fertile and commendably daft, their personalities are not of a kind to expose them to fullest advantage. They rush energetically from one antic to another with breathless energy, yet the effect is much the same as if in a Katzenjammer saga the cartoonist had forgotten to fill in the features of "Der Kaptain" and the kids.

That they are negative, in spite of their superior zest, is not the only thing working against the Messrs. Olsen and Johnson when they turn revue-makers. They have recruited from vaudeville and night clubs, but mainly from the radio, a large company, many members of which have talent. The Charlotteers possess fine voices. The Radio Rogues are clever mimics. Little Billy Adams is a droll Negro stepper. Hal Sherman can pantomime amusingly. Shirley Wayne handles the fiddle entertainingly. Walter Nilsson is an astonishing cyclist. Hardeen, Houdini's brother, has inherited some good tricks. Barto and Mann are certainly of different sizes. And Bettyne and Beverly Crane are charming dancers.

BUT, the revue in which these worthies appear is badly put together. It lacks editing. It is overwhelmingly long. Its lapses from taste are almost as frequent as its lapses from interest. It is all introduction and very little revue. If it is more amusing than "You Never Know" (which it unquestionably is), it is still very far from being a satisfactory musical. It ends up by turning against it even those stanch friends it had made during its happily insane first half hour. As a friend turned enemy, I warn you here-with that long before it is over "Hellzapoppin" proves to be the very opposite of what for a few blissful minutes it promises to be.

# "Hellzapoppin"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, September 23, 1938

## Bedlam Follies

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

SOMETHING called "Hellzapoppin," at the Forty-sixth Street Theater, may be a revue or it may be vaudeville or it may be the modern equivalent of Mark Twain's Royal Nonesuch, but at least it lives up to its name. It plunges all over the stage, up and down the aisles and through the upper boxes with much sound and fury, leaving a considerable trail of violent nonsense in its wake. It is, in fact, decidedly at its best when it forgets to be a revue with blackouts and sister teams, and permits its insanity full play. When the actors are firing off revolvers, hitting you in the back of the neck with puffed rice, writhing about in straitjackets or offering to sell you tickets to other shows, "Hellzapoppin" is in its properly manic mood. When it shows you news reels of Hitler and Mussolini, with the former talking in Jewish accents and the latter in deep Harlem tones, it is nothing short of marvelous. But when it goes in for some of its vaudeville sketches, it is merely depressing.

Another thing that can be said for "Hellzapoppin" is that it supplies a perfect test for those sentimental playgoers who say they lament the death of vaudeville. If you love the new show at the Forty-sixth Street Theater, there can be no doubt that you are sincere in lamenting that demise. For here is the corpse sitting up and thumbing its nose at you and at the world and indulging in ribald outcries and gesticulations. There ap-

peared to be no doubt that the first-night audience responded enthusiastically to the Bedlam Follies that the Messrs. Olsen and Johnson provide. To me, however, it seemed that while much of the madness was cheerful, hearty and enlivening, the greater part of it depended on the mere fact of its madness and didn't succeed in being funny. Certainly it isn't very good when it goes in for song and dancing, save in the case of the terpsichorean efforts of the comic Hal Sherman and of three Hawaiian girls, particularly the one in the center in the first-act finale.

A vital test of your enjoyment of the show lies in your attitude toward the stars and producers, Olsen and Johnson. My own guess is that these vaudeville veterans are exuberant and hard-working performers, but something less than first-rate comedians. Like their revue, they frequently make the mistake of thinking that madness without humor is a good enough substitute for mad humor. I doubt, too, if they are good selectors of comedy sketches. A few good blackouts would certainly have been welcome in "Hellzapoppin." All in all, I was very much disappointed in the new revue, even though I would be deceiving you if I did not confess that I enjoyed the man in the straitjacket, was interested in the gorilla that pursued the girl in the upper box and thought that the news reel of Hitler and Mussolini was among the great comic inventions of recent seasons.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, September 23, 1938

## "Hellzapoppin" Old Time Variety With a Touch of Minsky

"Hellzapoppin," a vaudeville revue assembled and produced by the Messrs. Olsen and Johnson at the 46th St. Theatre, New York, Sept. 22, 1938.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THE Olsen and Johnson idea promised good fun. They gathered together a collection of variety acts, some old, some new, some clever, some stupid, which always has been a fair vaudeville average, and strung them together in a noisy revue.

They called it "Hellzapoppin" for one reason or another and presented it at the 46th St. Theatre last night.

The idea, as said, was promising, but the results are no better than fair. There is good entertainment in this "Hellzapoppin." Most of it happens early in the evening.

The boys start with as clever an opening as any revue has shown these many days—a reproduction of news reels of the world's leaders in speaking pose. Their moving lips are the lips of President Roosevelt, Adolph Hitler, Benito Mussolini, John L. Lewis, etc., but their words are the words of a ribald jester behind the screen. The combination is original and hilarious.

### Ribald and Abandoned

After that Olsen and Johnson became a couple of Joe Cooks for a scene or two, introducing a series of ridiculous scenic novelties and a wardrobe of comic clothes.

They are utterly ribald and fearlessly abandoned. Never very smart but always very cheerful. Their show is old-time variety with a touch of burlesque, a dozen Grade B Orpheum acts routed over the Columbia Wheel. A noisy and irresponsible riot.

Half the show is performed in the aisles, with husky barkers passing through the audience with toy balloons, candy, chewing gum and souvenirs. An excited matron interrupts proceedings frequently to call lustily for her missing Oscar. It becomes necessary finally to execute Oscar. A lady on her way out is forced to explain that she is not quitting the

show; just going to the lady's room. Which will give you an idea of the Olsen and Johnson subtlety.

Such touches of refinement as "Hellzapoppin" boasts are furnished by sister acts, the Crane girls, the Reed girls and the Starlings. They are no more innocuous than most harmonizers and rather pretty, the Cranes particularly. The Cranes also contribute one of those mirror dances that grandmother used to love.

There is a trio of Radio Rogues. They imitate radio announcers, crooners and stars with considerable cleverness. There is a trio of Hawaiian dancers, with accompanying ukulele and crooner. Assisted by the ensemble, they present the most pretentious of the dance numbers.

Hardeen, the mystifier, is present with disappearing hens, pigeons and pests. A colored quartet that manages to be pretty unmusical but impressively persistent. The Barto and Mann acrobatic dancers, who dirty things up a bit.

If you should feel like an evening of old-time vaudeville, or, being young, would like to know what old-time vaudeville was like, here's an evening for you. A little cotton in the ears might help.

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# "Hellzapoppin"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, September 23, 1938

## World Notables Burlesqued in New Revue, "Hellzapoppin"

Strident Music, Shots, Shouted Jokes and General Bedlam in  
46th St. Like Times Sq. on New Year's Eve

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THERE is a lot of brass in the music that accompanies the new Olsen and Johnson revue, "Hellzapoppin," which opened last night at the Forty-sixth St. Theater, and there is a lot of brass in the noisy sketches that go to make up two and a half hours of rowdy vaudeville.

If some of the zip of this show were transferred to "You Never Know," and some of the softer candlelight scenes, of the latter production were given to "Hellzapoppin" it would be very much to the advantage of each of them.

Some of the public may be able to survive an entire evening of din. A gentleman two seats away from me howled with delight through the whole show, and he was not, I am sure, being paid to howl. As for me, after half an hour of it, I longed for the peace and quiet of "Our Town," and as this review is written, my ears are still ringing.

### First Act Is Funny

The first act is screamingly funny, perhaps because there are no humans in it. A talkie, purporting to show F. D. R., Hitler and Mussolini in violent harangues praising the Messrs. Olsen and Johnson and their revue—and how the speeches were dubbed in is a minor miracle of movie making—is satirical and hysteria-producing.

After that come the noise, the revolver shots, the banging on the tympani, the shouted jokes, the screaming stoges, the exploding automobiles and general bedlam. It becomes as lively, to put it mildly, as Times Sq. on New Year's Eve, or on the third night of an Ameri-

can Legion Convention, when the boys are getting warmed up to their work.

This is not to say that there are not, interspersed with the rowdy-dow free-for-all, a number of entertaining numbers. Once in a while you are given a moment to catch your breath, as, for example, when Bettymae and Beverly Crane go into their graceful dances, or "The Charioteers," a septet quartet, improve on the Mills brothers.

### Evening's High Light

Again, as a high light of the evening, there are the "Radio Rogues," Jimmy Hollywood, Eddie Bartell and Sidney Chatton, who give a brisk and faithful interpretation of various radio and screen stars, among them Ken Baker, Ben Bernie, Walter Winchell, Kate Smith, Rudy Vallee and almost anybody you can mention, including the President.

The general tone and humor of the production, however, is about at the level of burlesque, and some of the broader exploits of the principals, and in particular those of an otherwise amusing team, Barto and Mann, should be eliminated—at once.

Many of the acts, including "The Maternity Ward," "Wall Street" and "Who's the Dummy" are silly, rather than funny, and will appeal only to the weak-minded, and some of the nonsense is repetitious. Trimming the jokes, cutting the scenes, eliminating the questionable lines and actions, all this would bring the production closer to sanity, which is what it needs.

### Material for 2 Extravaganzas

There is material enough here for two good musical extravaganzas. Hal Sherman, the deadpan dancer, is worth seeing. So, in fact, are the Messrs. Olsen and Johnson—for fifteen minutes or so. It should be remembered, although the producers seem to have forgotten it, that old-time vaudeville, when it was good, varied the program. First slapstick, then a tear-jerker, a little melodrama, a "polite" song and dance, a little more comedy. Never bang-bang the whole evening long.

The music is more forceful than melodious, although one or two songs by Sammy Fain and Charles Tobias have a lift to them. The better of them are "It's Time to Say Aloha" and "When You Look in Your Looking Glass."

The chorus is well trained and fairly good looking, and the dances are well done.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, September 23, 1938

## 'Hellzapoppin' Appears in Forty-sixth Street Under the Protection of Olsen and Johnson

By BROOKS ATKINSON

FOLKS, it is going to be a little difficult to describe this one. "Hellzapoppin" is what they call it and it was discharged at the Forty-sixth Street last evening.

Deciding that it might be a good idea to put on a show, Ole Olsen and Chic Johnson, a pair of vaudeville knockabouts, stood on the corner of the street and stopped every third man. Those were their actors. Taking an old broom, they went up to the attic and swept out all the gags in sight. Those were their jokes. Dropping into an ammunition store downtown, they picked up several boxes of blank cartridges. Those were to indicate that the jokes had been told and that it was time to start laughing. Then they moved every-thing in sight into the Forty-sixth Street Theatre, got an audience down front and set them to laughing. Anything goes in "Hellzapoppin"—noise, vulgarity, practical joking—and about every third number is foolish enough for guffawing.

Very prominent in the proceedings are Olsen and Johnson, a pair of college cut-ups

now well on toward middle life without much flowering of their culture. As far as they are concerned, it is house-cleaning day in vaudeville. After a hilarious motion-picture prologue, in which some grotesque sounds and words come out of the pictures of F. D. R., the Little Flower, Hitler and Mussolini, Olsen and Johnson make their entrance in a clownish automobile and trailer and the uproar begins. It

pops out of all parts of the house. Up and down the aisles of the orchestra a persistent woman keeps shouting, "Oscar, Oscar!" in a tenement voice. A ticket speculator starts hawking good seats for "I Married an Angel." Eggs and bananas are tossed out to the audience, and when the lights go out the audience is besieged with spiders and snakes in the darkness. There is no relief even in the intermission. For that is the time when a clown starts paddling up the aisle and haunting unwary customers.

Probably the entertainment ought to show a higher trace of talent. The taste of "Hellzapoppin" runs to second-rate vaudeville turns, with chorus dancing of no particular consequence and some artificial warbling by a pair of damsels sweetly billed as "The Starlings." Ornithologically speaking, starlings are likely to be shot or poisoned. But you can see some mighty fine monocycling by Walter Nilsson and some roguish tap dancing by Hal Sherman, and you can hear some lymphatic fiddling by Shirley Wayne, who looks as though she were just on the point of frying a mess of doughnuts. Hardeen is there to astonish the innocent with some prodigious feats of magic.

But this is mainly a helter-skelter assembly of low-comedy gags to an ear-splitting sound accompaniment—some of it ugly, all of it fast. It is a revue concocted of what Al Graham described in yesterday's Conning Tower as "stewed fish-eyes and ragfloss." "I'll Say She Is" was funnier these many years ago because the Marx Brothers were in it. But if you can imagine a demented vaudeville brawl without the Marx Brothers, "Hellzapoppin" is it, and a good part of it is loud, low and funny.

# "Pins and Needles"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, December 13, 1937

## Proletarian Fun

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THE customary charge that the Left Wing boys and girls lack a sense of humor is most effectually refuted in the bright, tuneful and vastly entertaining revue called "Pins and Needles." This is the show that Labor Stage, a resourceful organization composed of members of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union is presenting for week-end performances at its theater on West Thirty-ninth Street, and which is proving so popular that, beginning Christmas night, it will be offered for a regular run. A gayly satirical revue that possesses much of the fresh and unspoiled quality of "The Garrick Gaieties" and "The Grand Street Follies," the new work not only makes cheerful and contemptuous fun of such class enemies as Mussolini, Hitler, the Japanese militarists, the professional patriots and the local reactionaries, but turns with high good humor on the excessive seriousness of some of its own graver partisans. It can laugh as merrily at itself as it can at its foes and that is a quality that makes it both disarming and persuasive. Here is social propaganda in its most winning fashion.

First of all, "Pins and Needles" has the advantage of a particularly engaging score. The work of a talented young man named Harold J. Rome, it is smart and satirical and melodious, offering shrewd popular music in clever and captivating fashion. Best of all is a song called "Sing Me a Song With Social Significance," which must certainly be the best new musical comedy number of the season. The gay and bantering fashion in which it takes its own class consciousness sets the tone of the show and reveals with fine conclusiveness why "Pins and Needles" is, among other things, so disarming an entertainment. It is, however, by no means the only good song in the revue. There is a number called "Doing the Reactionary" that should be popular even among the tory dancing sets, and there is an amusingly romantic air known as "One Big Union for Two," that is likewise both fresh and tuneful. It is a melancholy thought that Mr. Rome's next stop will no doubt be Hollywood.

Most amusing and significant of the sketches is Emanuel Eisenberg's "The Little Red Schoolhouse," which makes sharp and merciless fun of those serious and professionally radical dramas of the type that the Theater Union used to put on in its more

somber days. Some of the numbers could be readily dispensed with, I did not find the two symbolic ballets especially impressive, and it is disappointing to find so wise a satirist as Marc Blitzstein, the composer of "The Cradle Will Rock," snuffing at the Federal Theater Project and its bureaucracy in such feeble fashion. Fortunately, there are few weak episodes in "Pins and Needles." More characteristic of the show is the wistful little interlude called "Summer in the Park" and the good slapstick caricature of Mussolini, Hitler, the Japanese and Anthony Eden as "Four Little Angels of Peace." At its best, the proletarian revue captures a quality of political satire more biting than such elaborate shows as "I'd Rather Be Right" or "Hooray for What" manage to achieve in their expensive fashion.

The performers are, as they sing in their opening number, "plain," simple, common, ordinary, everyday men and women who work hard for a living. The chances are that there is no one great individual talent among them, but they are fresh, straightforward and unaffected and they have a disarming quality that is neither too professional nor too amateur to be disconcerting. It seemed to me that the two most interesting of them were Miss Ruth Rubenstein, who puts over several songs pleasantly, and Miss Anne Brown, who has a gift for caricature. The musical accompaniment is managed by two pianos, one of which is played by Mr. Rome, the composer. The settings are satisfactory and the dances are smoothly enough managed. "Pins and Needles" mixes a warm good humor with its social conscience and the result is an immensely likeable show.

regarding Tammany? The satirical cartoons of Thomas Nast, of course. And such instances—think, for instance, of the power of Dickens—could be multiplied.

### Production Stands Out

It is strange, therefore, that progressive movements have not more often used the powerful weapons of humor and wit. The production of "Pins and Needles" stands out more boldly for that reason.

All that, of course, has nothing to do with the artistic performance itself. We went to this show determined to make allowances for all the circumstances—the fact that the cast are employed workers, that they have little time for rehearsal, that there is no money to be wasted on expensive direction or mounting. And we found that no allowances were needed. It is a good show, a competent show, an interesting show. It has merriment in it, which is usually not associated with "causes," and best of all, it has no bitterness.

If we were to judge the cast from the strictly commercial viewpoint, we would say at once that Ruth Rubenstein and Lynne Jaffee, the girl principals in many of the series of sketches that go to make up the revue, were headed for big things; that they showed great promise. We would say of Hy Goldstein, Al Eben, Murray Modick and Paul Reynour that in their sketch, "Four Little Angels of Peace," in which Mussolini, Hitler, Hirohito and Anthony Eden are caricatured, they have something worthy of the Winter Garden. And it sometimes gives us to wonder whether the lure of the professional stage may not yet be too great and that the Labor Stage having developed its talent, may not lose some of it.

To Harold J. Rome, who wrote all the music and most of the lyrics, we express gratitude not only for rhymes that are clever but

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December 6, 1937

## In Praise of "Pins and Needles"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

THERE is plenty of amusement to be had at "Pins and Needles," so much in fact that it lends a special and very different significance to this intimate revue which the members of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union are presenting at Labor Stage over weekends.

"Pins and Needles" is a gay show, and an intelligent one. It widens the theatre's horizon, as they stand in desperate need of being widened, to include the interests and the problems of those who do not belong to what was once known as the carriage trade.

It is class conscious enough to satisfy the most arid propagandist. Yet it manages to say serious things lightly and to indict with a song and a smile. By so doing it makes a point twice as effectively as it would have done had it followed the sober routine methods of legit-prop drama in this country.

The members of the cast, whose union labels range from "white-goods," "cutters," "pressers," "dressmakers," "bonas embroiderers" to "dressmakers" and "underwear," are frankly and proudly amateurish. Their looks are far from prepossessing. But their spirits are high. The pleasure they take in what they are doing is contagious. They have some admirable skits and songs at their disposal. And they have been directed with uncommon zest and professionalism by Charles Friedman.

They aim at getting along without the spangles and the names, the scenery and the vacuity, and the "moon-and-June," "love-and-dove" rhymes so dear to the average Broadway revue. And without them they do get along very nicely indeed. In the place of opulence they put intelligence. And instead of silliness they provide often uproarious satire. Their production can be likened to a labor version of "The Garrick Gaieties" or "The Grand Street Follies."

If its dances are decidedly weak in execution, they are at least based, as in the case of "The General Is Unwieldy," upon excellent ideas. Several of the sketches, such as "F. T. P. Plowed Under," and "Four Little Angels of Peace," are too long for their own good. But all of them have something to say. And some of them, such as "Sunday in the Park," "We'd Rather Be Right," and the hilarious parody of the Theatre Union's production of "Mother," have a joyous, hence deadly, effectiveness. Harold J. Rome's music and lyrics are exceptionally good, especially in the case of "Sing Me a Song Which Has Social Significance," "Vassar Girl Finds a Job," and "Doing the Reactionary."

Indeed the whole production eloquently justifies the claims of its sponsors that the labor theatre in this country has found its sense of humor. "Pins and Needles" is related at once to life and to joy. By turning its propaganda into good entertainment, its message is doubly insured, and doubly telling as propaganda.

humor that is understandable. And also for melodies that are agreeable.

### "Angel" Sketch Effective

Of the sketches, the "Four Little Angels of Peace" mentioned above seemed to us as effective as any, both in its conception and its presentation. Another, in which the consumer is eventually squirted with soda water as the result of an impetus that comes (via the Rube Goldberg route) through the retailer, the wholesaler, the manufacturer and the banker, was happily ludicrous. Emanuel Eisenberg's sketch "The Little Red Schoolhouse" was delightful, and the lusty walloop taken at the Federal Theater Project and bureaucracy under the title "F. T. P. Plowed Under" was excellent.

The entire cast enters into the performance with an enthusiasm and lack of self-consciousness that is refreshing. They have a wonderful time on the stage, and that produces the only possible reaction in front of the footlights—the customers have a wonderful time, too.

Reprinted from  
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM,  
December 30, 1937

## The Rich Cleverly Satirized

### "Pins and Needles" on Labor Stage Has Critic's Approval

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THIS is a belated but nevertheless sincere cheer for "Pins and Needles," that clever musical satire presented by the I. L. G. W. U. on Labor Stage, which ribs the moneyed classes so beautifully that it has begun to attract the limousine trade.

This is indeed progress. If, by the quality of their art, these worker-players can lure chinchilla and other fur-bearing females into their theater in 39th St., this may be the beginning of a rapprochement leading to an era of social peace and good will. It has always seemed to me that satirical propaganda is more effective than a direct and too serious approach to any issue. What agency more than any other helped smash the Tweed ring and awaken public conscience

# "Pins and Needles"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, November 29, 1937

## 'Pins and Needles,' Leftist Revue, Opens at the Labor Stage

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THE I. L. G. W. U. Players have, they sing, "got a different slant." Not for them are lyrics concerned with the moon of June, which beams from above on those who love. "Sing us a song with social significance," they plead in "Pins and Needles," which was put on Saturday evening by the Labor Stage, housed in the tiny Thirty-ninth Street Theater which was once the Princess. They answer their own plea by singing several, including one entitled: "One Big Union for Two." That should give the idea.

If it does not, consider that these players are not professionals of the theater. As members of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, they are professionals of the shops. They are also class-conscious Leftists, eager to sink the barb of their satire in well-conditioned skins. And class-conscious Leftists are not notable for the light touch, or for deftly pointed wit, any more than their boys and girls are notable for the glossy beauty one sees in professional revues. You may be surprised, considering and no doubt deprecating all this to hear that the boys and girls of the I.L.G.W.U. are often pretty funny; that at their best their songs and sketches have the enlivening sting that wit has, whatever side it comes from. They have their moments of heavy-handedness and

dead-pan propagandizing, but they can also laugh. And, probably for the first time in labor stage history, they can laugh at themselves, as well as at their antagonists.

By all odds the richest, most perceptive thing to do, for example, is a burlesque of Brecht's "Mother" that direfully serious absurdity which the Theater Union offered at the Civic Repertory Theater in 1935. "Mother," heaven knows, was on their side of the argument, and "Mother," heaven knows, was ridiculous. It is fun to see the I.L.G.W.U. laughing heartily at its ponderosity. It is fun, also, to hear them laughing at the dictators in "Four Little Angels of

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, November 29, 1937

## Labor Stage Troupe Romps Through New "Pins and Needles"

By BURNS MANTLE

THERE is always one laugh guaranteed in any approach to the Labor Stage. "The Ilgwu Players." Something defiantly aboriginal about that "Ilgwu." Harold Rome should write a song about it. "The Ilgwu in Their Igloo."

Just now there are more laughs than one in the entertainment the Ilgwus are offering in their own playhouse in 39th St. "Pins and Needles" is a musical revue that does the International Lady Garment Workers' Union credit. It is their second show, the propaganda drama, "Steel," having been the first.

Their second show is offered as "that organization's answer to the oft-repeated charge that labor theatres must by definition be humorless."

"It illustrates the concept of working-class drama," the program statement continues, "which has guided Labor Stage, Inc., from the beginning that plays for workers must be entertaining because workers are just as human as anybody else." The answer also to capitalism's implied query, "Are workers people?"

### The Broadway Touch

"Pins and Needles" is imitative of the Broadway theatre in form. A series of songs and sketches, ensemble numbers and timid excursions into the realms of interpretive dancing.

But I suspect it is also the nearest approach to a revival of the old labor guild spirit of self expression that labor groups have achieved in our day.

It includes good-natured slaps at the idiosyncrasies and extravagances of ruling personalities. A "Mussolini Handicap," in which four buxom prize-winning matrons are honored for their records of productivity, is a feature.

This is a song of singles, twins and quadruplets that is followed by the lament of "Public Enemy No. 1," an anemic young woman who, try as she will, has never been able to deliver more than one baby at a time. A burlesque entitled "We'd Rather Be Right," spoofing the 100 per cent American fellow who smother every suggestion of

progressivism with the charge that it is quite un-American, is followed by a harmless bit of color and melody called "Sunday in the Park."

A touch of slapstick cartooning on the soak the consumer theme, done in the Rube Goldberg manner, is followed by one of those rousing propaganda numbers in march time called "Men Awake."

### Good Spirited Fun

All in fun, but with a stringer attached when appropriate. There is a "Lesson in Etiquette" in which a society lady is pushed about by the banner carriers while she insists in song that "It isn't cricket to picket."

Also the lament of a Vassar girl who had to submit her I Q to Macy to get a trivial clerkship. ("and when they were through, what there was to know Macy knew") is originally illustrated.

A lively and tuneful "One Big Union for Two" number, and an amusing battle royal for "Four Little Angels of Peace"—Eden, Mussolini, Hitler and a gentleman from Japan—in which Hitler and Mussolini turn on each other, were especially popular.

Credits are too numerous to mention. Harold Rome wrote most of the music and lyrics, which furnish the vertebrae of the review. The Ilgwu Players are variously talented and they have been faithful at rehearsals.

### 'PINS AND NEEDLES'

A revue in two acts, music and lyrics mostly by Harold J. Rome; sketches by Arthur Arent, Marc Blitzstein, Emanuel Eisenberg, Charles Friedman and Harold J. Rome; staged by Mr. Friedman; designed by S. Syrjala. Presented by the Labor Stage, Inc., at its own theater on November 27, 1937. The cast includes Paul Semour, Enzo Grassi, Al Levy, Hy Goldstein, Fred Schmidt, Millie Weiss, Irene Fox, Lynne Jaffee, Ruth Rubinstein, Nettie Harary, Al Eben, Anne Brown, Rose Newark, Murray Medick and many others, all members of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union.

Peace." A good deal of it, as a matter of fact is fun whether you agree or not. Some of it, of course, is heavy, and once or twice, as in a burlesque of the Federal Theater, the boys and girls betray a confused lack of perspective.

The appeal is not to the general audience, and such play reviewers as were interested were there on sufferance. The I.L.G.W.U. Players have their own purposes, as well as their own slant. This is, so far as I am aware, the first time they have managed to turn laughter to those purposes.

Reprinted from  
NEW YORK TIMES,  
November 29, 1937

## Pins and Needles

A NEW addition to the growing list of imaginative and youthful theatrical groups which are making monkeys out of the folk who think it is fashionable to say the theatre is dead, was made Saturday night at the Labor Stage in West Thirty-ninth Street. Throwing to the winds the radical stage's tradition of waxing serious over this country's more disturbing tendencies, the Players of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, the articulate affiliate of the C. I. O., presented a musical satire, "Pins and Needles," which entertainingly spoofs boss and workers alike.

"Pins and Needles" has been in preparation for more than a year—there have been varieties of informal previews—because the garment workers, whose union labels are carefully itemized in the program, had to sandwich in rehearsals with more remunerative service to the shears and sewing machine. The finished product, however, was worth the wait, for "Pins and Needles" is a witty and tuneful morsel considerably enhanced by the infectious enthusiasm of the cast and a thoroughly workmanlike job on the technical end.

True, the I. L. G. W. U. Players, ably directed by Charles Friedman, do not miss many plugs for the anti-fascism cause and for the working man in general, but the propaganda is deftly weaved into skits and songs more concerned with providing entertainment first. Harold J. Rome, plucked from the Summer camp circuit, emerges as a composer and lyricist worth watching, his contributions including "Sing Us a Song with Social Significance," "Doin' the Reactionary," "Four Little Angels of Peace Are We" and "One Big Union for Two."

Emanuel Eisenberg, the Group Theatre's advance man, has contributed a sketch carrying the labor play to its logical conclusion and Arthur Arent donated one about the all-Italy maternity handicap. Marc Blitzstein, of "The Cradle Will Rock" fame, dissects the Federal Theatre officials who are terrified by WPA guards. Gluck Sandor routined the dances. Benjamin Zemach did the choreography and Sointu Syrjala the settings.

Accepted in the good-natured spirit in which it is offered, "Pins and Needles" is certainly a revue out of the ordinary and one which only occasionally droops to the level of the things which it is satirizing. And in all the left-wing theatre may take pride in this delayed descent from the usual soap box. For the present, the I. L. G. W. U. Players are giving performances Friday night and Saturday afternoon and evening. Beginning Jan. 3, it plans nightly performances, except Sunday, and a Saturday matinee. J. G.



# "Tobacco Road"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, December 5, 1933

## Henry Hull in "Tobacco Road," Based On the Novel by Erskine Caldwell

By BROOKS ATKINSON

SINCE it is based on a novel, "Tobacco Road," which was acted at the Masque last evening, is not an organic play. Although Jack Kirkland has turned it into three acts, it is still Erskine Caldwell's novel at heart, which is to say that is more like a soliloquy with variations than a dramatic character sketch. Under Mr. Caldwell's influence it is also one of the grossest episodes ever put on the stage. Once the theatre used to be sinful. But now it is the novel that ferrets out the abominations of life and exposes them for sale in the marketplace. The men of letters have stolen the dramatists' crimson badge; and the theatre has never sheltered a fouler or more degenerate parcel of folks than the handscreaky family of Lester that lives along the "Tobacco Road."

But that is not a full and disinterested report of the Masque Theatre's current tenant. For Mr. Caldwell is a demonic genius—brutal, grimly comic and clairvoyant. No

one has chronicled the complete degeneracy of the Georgia cracker with such inhuman detachment. He writes with the fiery sword. Although "Tobacco Road" reels around the stage like a drunken stranger to the theatre, it has spasmodic moments of merciless power

when truth is flung into your face with all the slime that truth contains. That is why Mr. Caldwell's grossness cannot be dismissed as morbidity and gratuitous indecency. It is the blunt truth of the characters he is describing, and it leaves a malevolent glow of poetry above the rudeness of his statement.

"Tobacco Road" is the saga of Jeeter Lester, a good-for-nothing farmer who still lives on the land his father and grandfather farmed. But it is no longer his. Being lazy and dissolute, he has lost everything and now exists with his tatterdemalion family in the dirt and filth of a rickety shack. The Lesters are ragged, foul, starving and lazy. But still Jeeter preserves that fluency of talk and fecundity of crack-brained ideas and that animal sensuality which live in the lower darkness. Everything exists on the same plane of inhumanity. Even death leaves no impression upon life that is dead in everything save the body.

As Jeeter Lester, Henry Hull gives the performance of his career. For years Mr. Hull has been charming and trivial about many things and singularly obtuse about some others. But here is a character portrait as mordant and brilliant as you can imagine. Dressed in loathsome rags, untidily bearded and heavily wrinkled, Mr. Hull's Georgia cracker staggers through a whole gamut of emotions and passions—pungent, pathetic, horrible and gargantuanly comic.

The performance is shabbily directed. But it includes an excellent portrait of a headlong boy by Sam Byrd and a picturesque setting by Robert Redington Sharpe. Plays as clumsy and rudderless as "Tobacco Road" seldom include so many scattered items that leave such a vivid impression.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, December 5, 1933

## Tragedy Runs Deep In "Tobacco Road"

Play Dealing with Poor Whites of Georgia Too Dolorous To Be Viewed Seriously.

By ROBERT GARLAND

YOU'LL be glad you aren't in Dixie when you see the play Jack Kirkland has founded on Erskine Caldwell's "Tobacco Road," a novel highly spoken of by the novel-reading cognoscenti. Away down South in the land of cotton they're looking forward to the depression.

The Lesters are, at any rate. Or they would be if, in the back country of their native Georgia, they had ever heard of it.

They haven't heard of it, however, being all hemmed in by a superior depression of their own. In my theatre-going days I am yet to see a more feckless family than these Lesters Mr. Kirkland inherited from

Mr. Caldwell. Outstanding members of the hangdog and hookworm set, they enjoy as superior miseries as the drama has so far known. They're in the lower lower depths.

Reading from left to right and back again, they're miserable Southerners, and there's no health in them. And no wealth, either.

Being as God, the civil war or Mr. Caldwell made them, they won't do anything about it. Not they! From Grandma Lester, who lives a life akin to that of the subterranean mole, to Grandson Dude Lester, who is partial to the bouncing of balls and the blowing of automobile horns, the Lesters prefer to be peculiar in their quaint back-country way. It is, you gather, an old Georgian custom.

### Much Happens Between Dozing Spells

When the curtain rises at the Masque,

where "Tobacco Road" is playing, Jeeter Lester is dozing on the dilapidated front porch of his dilapidated house in the most dilapidated part of Georgia. When the curtain falls at the Masque, where "Tobacco Road" is still playing, Jeeter Lester is dozing on the dilapidated front porch of his dilapidated house in the most dilapidated part of Georgia.

In between these dozes almost everything has happened. Almost everything you can think of, and many a thing you can't.

Among the things you can think of is the old meanie who, in a derby and pretending not to be Jack Dalton, swoops in from Augusta to take Jeeter Lester's farm from him. And the Dude Lester who, although a youngster, marries Sister Bessie Rice so as to come into possession of an automobile horn to play with. And the Sister Bessie Rice who marries in haste and repents immediately.

And the Pearl of great price—seven dollars her husband paid for her—who, as far as she's concerned, is married in name only.

And Ada Lester who, married to Jeeter, wants a stylish new dress to wear to her own funeral. (She gets the funeral without the dress, which shows how relentless a relentless play can be.) And Lov Benney, the only comparatively sane person in the Caldwell-Kirkland undertaking, who is poison to his Pearl of seven-dollar price. And Ellie May, who belongs in one of those books the doctors are supposed to read.

...

### Misery Beyond Old Russia's

The Russians—the misery-loving Russians of the good old Gorky-Dostoyevsky days—would be ashamed of the minor miseries of "The Lower Depths" and "The Brothers Karamazov." In the face of "Tobacco Road" they would. For the Georgians revealed last night are Gorky-Dostoyevsky Russians raised to the 17th degree. Singly and collectively they suffer from the Stephen Foster blues.

What I mean is that they're so doggone discouraged that life is just a bowl of hookworms marching Sherman-like through Georgia.

This and its accompanying tribulations would be considerably more discouraging were it not for the histrionics of Henry Hull. As the man who came back with whiskers Mr. Hull gives one of the finest performances of a career that has not been free of fine performances. In all such serio-comic plays "serio" when written by a novelist and "comic" when translated into make-believe—it is difficult to grasp your characterization and hold it intact to the end.

This Mr. Hull does.

In the surrounding cast I care for Sam Byrd, who goes in for automobile horns in a big way; for Margaret Wycherly, who bites the hand that wouldn't feed her, and for Ruth Hunter, who is called upon to do things Kraft-Ebbing never heard of. Renée Behan has several good reasons for being Pearl, and Dean Jagger had one good reason for being Lov Benney. Mr. Jagger is underrated by Miss Behan.

"Tobacco Road" is too tragic to be taken seriously. Like life, it is consistently incredible. And a trifle off key.

# "Tobacco Road"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, December 5, 1933

## 'Tobacco Road,' Dramatization of a Novel, Opens at the Masque Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

ERSKINE CALDWELL'S burrowing among the facts of life in the Georgia backwoods was revealed to Broadway last evening in a play fashioned from his "Tobacco Road," by Jack Kirkland. At the Masque Theater it bears the same title and is concerned, in Mr. Caldwell's perhaps intentionally humorous way, with death, poverty, lust and deformity. These distressing misfortunes are rather loosely strung together in a lagging drama which quite frequently achieves the repulsive and seldom falls below the faintly sickening.

How closely it follows the novel I can only guess. Mr. Caldwell's "God's Little Acre" having forced me into a detour around the rest of his little stories. It seems, however, to have the flavor. It is a photograph and many insist an accurate enough photograph, of life among the Southern "poor whites." The scene is the exterior of the Lester farmhouse and the extremely dusty yard in front of it. The Lesters have, for several generations, been going into a sullen decline. Old Grandma Lester can now do no more than grovel wearily in the dust, until finally she summons the strength to totter out and die in the fields.

Jeeter Lester—who is painted full-length and excellently played by Henry Hull—is a shiftless no-count, who does a little stealing now and then. His wife wishes a stylish dress to die and be buried in. One of their daughters has a hare-lip and spends the first act in

squirming about in the dust, so expressing in her pretty way an avidness for the caresses of a neighbor boy who is married to her sister. The sister has beautiful yellow hair and a strong distaste for her husband. Another young Lester marries a buxom and amorous "lady preacher" because she promises to buy him a new car. Eventually he runs over his mother in the car and kills her. She, you may be sure, drags herself back to die in the dust in front of the house, giving up the ghost only after she has severely bitten her husband, thus forcing him to release the daughter with beautiful yellow hair, whom he had thought to return to her husband by force.

The casual indifference of the Lesters and their associates to all the horrors which sur-

### "TOBACCO ROAD"

A play in three acts by Jack Kirkland; based on the novel by Erskine Caldwell; staged and presented at the Masque Theater by Anthony Brown.

The cast:  
Jeeter Lester ..... Henry Hull  
Dude Lester ..... Sam Byrd  
Ada Lester ..... Margaret Wycherly  
Ellie May ..... Ruth Hunter  
Grandma Lester ..... Patricia Quinn  
Henry Peabody ..... Ashley Cooper  
Sister Bessie Rice ..... Maude Odell  
Lov Bonney ..... Dean Jagger  
Pearl ..... Renée Rehan  
Captain Tim ..... Lamar King  
George Payne ..... Edwin Walter

round them provides Mr. Caldwell's humor. Learning that his mother has disappeared, and only guessing that she may have wandered out into the brush fire, Jeeter remarks that he must go out and have a look for her one of these days. It has been suggested, in connection with the author's other works, that this casual attitude, and the excessive piling up of bizarre incidents in which he indulges, establish Mr. Caldwell as a satirist. Mr. Caldwell has already indignantly denied any such intention, assuring literary critics that they saw a good deal of humor in his books, which he didn't. If "Tobacco Road" is a fair sample, Mr. Caldwell does seem to have been unfairly dealt with. It is clear that his humor is almost entirely unintentional.

Mr. Hull is the only actor whose part is drawn as more than a "folkplay" type. Jeeter is, thanks both to the authors and the actor, a fine sturdy character, acutely understood and skillfully presented. Miss Margaret Wycherly intones her role; Miss Ruth Hunter's squirmings were rather distressing to watch, although she was doubtless doing precisely what she was told; Sam Byrd plays adequately in the role of the boy. Others do what they can for a callow and unpleasant play.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, December 5, 1933

## Henry Hull Achieves Remarkable Stage Portrait of Southern Primitive

"Tobacco Road," drama by Jack Kirkland from a novel by Erskine Caldwell. Produced by Anthony Brown at the Masque Theatre, New York, Dec. 4, 1933.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

A TOBACCO road is a dirt road. It runs off from the civilized center of things into the depths of the plantation, where mostly primitives live and life is a shiftless, lazy, animal-like existence.

Jack Kirkland has taken a story from Erskine Caldwell's novel of a tobacco road in deep Georgia and put it into play form. Called it "Tobacco Road," reasonably enough. And it, too, is a shiftless, lazy, animal kingdom sort of play, though an honest job of writing.

A bit too honest in certain respects and some scenes. An ugly wallowing sort of drama that not only strengthens your disgust with specific examples of the so-called human race, but also gives you a certain feeling of verminous contact with it.

### The Hull Show

Shining through the ugliness and grime of the drama, however, is a fine exhibition of character portraiture by Henry Hull. Much the best exhibit of his art, it seems to me, the actor has given in a considerable spell.

He plays Jeeter Lester, farmer. A hard chewing, spitting, cursing son of the soil who sleeps in his clothes as long as they will stand the strain and approaches the responsibilities of husbandry and domestic service with the intelligence and enthusiasm of a Belgian hare.

Jeeter, his family in rags, his children scattered to the four corners of the State, his farm a waste because he has no credit with which to buy seed to plant, gives you a

glimpse of the Lester living routines through the better part of two days.

### Family Group

He quarrels with his beaten, starved, shiftless wife, whose consuming ambition it is, aside from the recurring hope of food, to get hold of a stylish dress to die in.

He prays with Sister Bessie, a self-appointed agent of the Lord, who lusts after the younger men and buys a Lester son with an automobile and a promise of a job as preacher as well as husband.

He steals a bag of turnips from his son-in-law come to demand his marital rights from a Lester daughter who prefers a bit of straw on the floor to his bed.

He cruelly upbraids a daughter defaced from birth with a split lip that discourages suitors but fails to depress her hope of eventual possession.

And finally, when the son runs over his mother with the amorous pealm sister's automobile and leaves her dying in the front yard, Jeeter goes to sleep on the porch while waiting for others to dig his wife's grave in the field.

Another case of art's labor lost, this "Tobacco Road." I fear. It isn't the sort of entertainment folks buy in the theaters. Nor ever have bought within my memory.

There is no emotional satisfaction to be had from sheer ugliness, however artfully displayed or expressed.

Therefore, though Mr. Hull's performance is a perfect study, amazingly detailed, tellingly pictured, believable even in its exaggerations, there is no more than the appeal of a cold art in it. And there are few art connoisseurs among paying playgoers.

Splendid performances, too, by Dean Jagger as the repulsed son-in-law; by Sam Byrd as the youthful bridegroom; by Maude Odell as the praying husky; by Ruth Hunter as the unhappy split-lip; by Margaret Wycherly as the hopeless mother and by Renée Rehan as the man-hating daughter.

A dirt road by Robert Redington Sharpe and direction by Anthony Brown, the producer.

# "Tobacco Road"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, December 5, 1933

## Americana

By PERCY HAMMOND

**I**N A play sometimes terrifying, sometimes humorous, the authors of "Tobacco Road" escort us to the Georgia back-country, there to put us into intimate contact with the poor whites of that God-forsaken region. The expedition is thorough and well conducted, and I venture to say that it will be stimulating to experienced patrons of the Irish and Russian hut-drama. Also to those who get a naughty thrill from stark disclosures of the primitive human animal while writhing in the throes of gender. It may not be recommended to the squeamish, if any, since it is relentlessly ruttish and unclean. But to me, whose knowledge of such things has been gained from a casual reading of the more brutal fiction of the South, it is a vividly authentic, minor and squalid tragedy, lighted in the right spots with glowing and honest humor.

The scene is a forlorn Georgia farmstead, a tumble-down shack inhabited by Jeeter

Lester, his slattern wife and their brood. Jeeter (Mr. Henry Hull) is afflicted with all the ailments of his type, from indolence to sleeping sickness, but he has a Micawber sense of humorous hope. They have no money, and the only food they get is when Jeeter forages the cupboards of his neigh-

bors. One of his wife's daughters by another man is wedded, at the age of twelve, to a husband who revolts her. His youngest son is taken in marriage by an amorous female evangelist, an ex-prostitute from Augusta. All of this meets with his approval, but he is tragically disturbed when the bankers come along and threaten to evict him from the land that has belonged to the lazy Lesters since God knows when.

All of this, of course, is but a sparse approximation of the contents of "Tobacco Road." Its slight suggestions of incest and other eccentric emotions must, in the interest of newspaper delicacy, be hidden from print. It cannot be told here how the harp-riddled Ellie May goes into indecent, Egyptian convulsions, nor how Lov Bensey bares his passion for Pearl Lester's golden locks. It should be enough to hint that the love-life and economics of the characters of "Tobacco Road" are suitable subjects for study by those who are able to take it. In case I may be permitted a moment of enthusiasm, I shall use it in praising the characterization by Henry Hull of the moth-eaten old jungle Georgian, Jeeter Lester. If, in my many adventures into the Theater, I have ever seen a completer impersonation, I have forgotten it. He is that difficult character from tip to toe, never for an instant deviating from his honest delineation. I remove my brown derby to Mr. Hull for his achievement; as I do to Mr. Sam Byrd for his uncompromised acting as an insolent brat of Mr. Caldwell's misanthropic back-lands.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, December 5, 1933

## Anthony Brown Presents Henry Hull at the Masque in Mr. Caldwell's "Tobacco Road"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

**T**HOUGH I have not read Erskine Caldwell's "Tobacco Road" and think but little of the play which John Kirkland has made from it, I must confess there are several vital and earthy moments in the production which Anthony Brown has given it at the Masque that bear the unmistakable marks of Mr. Caldwell's writing as it revealed itself in such a novel as "God's Little Acre."

What I am getting at is that Mr. Kirkland's dramatization seems, on the face of it, to belong much more to Mr. Caldwell than it does to Mr. Kirkland, and for that very reason it fails as a play. It is another book-bound script, which is interesting enough in all those brutally atmospheric moments at which Mr. Caldwell excels as a novelist but which proves ridiculously inept whenever it attempts to twist its slight plot into dramatic form.

It succeeds most when it sounds as if some one who was reading Mr. Caldwell's pages aloud to you had somehow managed to fill your eyes as well as your ears with pictures of the drab animals, known as human beings, who inhabit the back country of Mr. Caldwell's Georgia. But the theatre is a cruelly tricky place, and the same unrelieved brutality which can lend conviction to the chapters of a novel can prove absurdly overdrawn and laughable when acted out upon a stage.

### Insane Sex Living

It is this very thing which seems to have happened at the Masque to the lustful morons

of "Tobacco Road." Denied the protection of print, seen in the flesh rather than described in words, and spied upon by an audience rather than encountered alone, these men and women become incredible caricatures of themselves. Almost every third speech they utter tends to undo whatever may have been done by the two speeches they have just spoken. For what might pass in the library as an author's sincere notion of the primitiveness of the "poor whites" soon begins to sound in the theatre like a long-drawn parody of all the grim tales of the soil that have come out of the South.

Mr. Caldwell's story, as retold by Mr. Kirkland, is a resolutely squalid yarn which describes the unhappy home life of the pitiful Lesters. They are a weird lot of savages,

these Lesters; filthy, starved, light-fingered and lecherous. They are pigs who wallow in the dirt of the miserable sty they are willing to call home. They have the look of pigs, the smell of pigs, the habits of pigs, and the morals of guinea pigs. They are so close to the soil that it is hard to tell them from it.

Old Pa Lester loves the little strip of land upon which he and his forefathers have eked out an existence. He loves it so much that he tries to save it from the banks, which have taken it over, by means of all inhuman bargains that, for three loose-jointed and feeble acts, provide "Tobacco Road" with whatever plot it can boast.

He is a profane old codger who delights in recalling his promiscuous past; who thinks nothing of taunting one of his daughters about the split upper lip which disfigures her; who encourages his worthless son to marry an elderly lady preacher for the automobile she promises to buy him; who leaves his mute old mother-in-law unburied in the nearby fields, and who ignores the wishes of his wife even in her hour of death and is willing to sell her illegitimate daughter back to the young husband from whom she has run away.

### More Than Three Little Pigs

Though there are times when the loamy morials in "Tobacco Road" have an authentic and an unconventional interest that cannot be denied, the play in which they find themselves is, on the whole, as feeble as it is unpleasant. It has been carefully produced at the Masque, includes a single setting by Mr. Sharpe which finds the stage floor heaped in dirt, and is well enough acted by Sam Byrd, Ruth Hunter, Dean Jagger and Renee Rehan.

Maude Odell is very hard to put up with in the entirely phony part of the lustful lady preacher. Margaret Wycherly is appropriately fagged and weary as the ill-used mother. And Henry Hull—sporting a fierce crop of red hair, a grizzly beard, a stained shirt, overalls and a great pair of dusty shoes—not only has a very good time of it as old Pa Lester but gives one of the best performances of his career. But he cannot save the play from itself or from the deadening weight of its live stock it chooses to parade as men and women.